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GRAINGER'S THORN. .

VOL. II.

GRAINGER'S THORN.

A Novel.

BY

THOMAS WRIGHT

(THE 'JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER').

AUTHOR OF

'SOME HABITS AND CUSTOMS OF THE WORKING CLASSES,'
'JOHNNY ROBINSON,' 'THE BANE OF A LIFE,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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GRAINGER'S THORN.


BOOK II.—CHAPTER III.

PREACHING DOWN A DAUGHTER'S HEART.

FROM this time Vernon availed himself liberally of the general invitation to 'drop in' at Wilkinson's, and after each visit he became more deeply and passionately enamoured of Florence. She saw that he did so; but her own conduct in the matter was very fitful. Sometimes she was all softness to him, repaying his homage with looks so kind as to be almost if not quite looks of love; conversing with him in low murmuring under-tones, letting his breath play with her hair and his lips almost touch

hers as he leaned over her at the piano ; allowing her hand to rest lingeringly in his when saying their good-nights, and altogether acting in a way to encourage his love. At other times her manner was such that it indicated aversion rather than love. She would be snappish and abrupt with him in conversation, would contemptuously frown down his attempts to whisper soft nothings, shrink from him when he came near her, seem impatient for him to be gone, and relieved when he went. But on their next meeting she would generally be almost gushing, and seem only anxious to atone, by present warmth of manner, for past waywardness. This behaviour looked very like coquetry, and Vernon believed that it was nothing more ; but it was in reality the outcome of far deeper feelings, —of distracted and passion-tossed moods of mind.

Vernon's good looks, gentlemanly manner, and devotion to herself won upon



her until she was herself at a loss to know whether the feeling with which she regarded him was friendship or love. That it was less than passionate love she knew, but she also believed that it was more than simple friendship. Had she never met Grainger, she said to herself, she would have had no doubt as to her love for Vernon—and there was the rub. Her heart was swayed between the two men. Would Grainger have declared himself all doubt and hesitation would have been at an end with her; but in the face of his changed manner, she grew lovingly inclined towards Vernon, and so far as reason or calculation weighed in the matter, they were in his favour. He would be a good match, such a match as at one time she had never dreamed of gaining. He would be a husband of whom she might be justly proud before her friends; and he was so fond of her, so kind and chivalrous about her, so long-suffering and forgiving in re-

guard to her unjustifiable changeableness of manner towards him.

These were the thoughts—and especially the last of them—that brought on her melting moods. But from time to time would come more passionate thoughts, making her feel angry alike with herself and Vernon,—thoughts which ran to the effect that if she dared but submit to a rigid self-examination, she would find that, notwithstanding his coldness, her heart was still Grainger's; that the fact of her having no doubt on the question was in itself conclusive proof that she did not really love Vernon, and that in allowing feelings of pique or policy to force her into a self-stultifying persuasion that she did love him, she was guilty of self-degradation.

These were the reflections that drove her into her bitterer moods, and her reception of Vernon's loverlike attentions was encouraging or the reverse according as her feelings happened to be swayed by

the one or other train of thoughts. As time went on, however, the softer thoughts appeared to prevail. She became more uniformly kind, and Vernon waxed more and more warmly and markedly attentive. In addition to seeing her at home, he took to escorting her to and from concerts, walking home from church with her, and generally constituting himself her attendant whenever an opportunity for doing so occurred. His worshipful devotion to her—his infatuation the women mostly called it—of course soon became the talk of the Mount, and at length intelligence of his proceedings reached his mother. To her such a thing appeared in the nature of a calamity, and she immediately, and in a highly indignant spirit, proceeded to put him to the question.

‘What low connection is this I hear you are forming?’ she abruptly asked him, as they sat at breakfast one morning.

He knew what she meant, and indeed,

knowing her views on such topics, had for some time before been expecting an attack; but putting on an air of surprise, he exclaimed,

‘A low connection? I don’t understand!’

‘No, I’m afraid you do not understand these things as I do,’ she answered; ‘but you know what I mean—your attentions, your *paraded* attentions, to this bold-faced, low-bred, play-acting girl.’

‘You allude to Miss Wilkinson?’ he said questioningly, as though even now he was not quite sure that he had caught her meaning.

‘I suppose I do,—I believe that is her name,’ she answered, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

‘Pardon me, then,’ he said, frowning heavily as he spoke; ‘but I will not allow even you to speak of her in that manner in my persence. You have no right or justification to do so in any presence, no more



right than any other person would have to refer to Blanche in such terms.'

'There is no occasion for heroics,' the mother replied. 'I intended no insinuation against her character; she is well enough in her way, but she is no fit person for your name to be associated with in the manner it is.'

'I shall take the liberty of being the best judge of that,' he answered.

'You might if you alone were concerned,' she said; 'but you should remember that there is something due to your sister and me, and the name you bear, and you should think of the circumstances in which we are placed. If you cannot do anything to retrieve our position you should not, at the least, do anything to drag us to a lower depth.'

'I would not do anything that I thought would injure you, mother,' he said, speaking in a softer tone, 'but I don't see how following my own bent

in this matter could do so. I do remember the circumstances in which we are placed, and I think that under them it would be the veriest snobbery for me to allow myself to be swayed by feelings of *caste*. Miss Wilkinson is the sister of my fellow-clerk, an educated, intelligent girl of stainless character, a lady in all essentials, and one of winning whom any man might be proud.'

'Am I—am I to understand that you are seriously wooing her, then?' gasped Mrs Vernon, aghast.

'Most seriously and sincerely.'

'And would you marry her?' she asked, in the same gasping way.

'Yes, to-morrow, if circumstances permitted, and she would have me; and I hope that at no very distant day she and circumstances *will* allow.'


He spoke decisively and defiantly; and, irritated by his bearing even more than by his words, the mother lost control

of her temper, and bitter things were said on both sides.

Nor was this the only trial of the kind that Mrs Vernon was called upon to endure.

Though the family were in dire affliction when they came to settle at the Mount, Mr Grainger, on considering the details of his position in reference to his design of winning Blanche, came to the conclusion that it behoved him to immediately enter upon the prosecution of his love campaign. The time, he argued, was drawing near when Harding might be expected to return, and his re-appearance would probably lead to a formal engagement, which could then be pleaded in a fashion that would tacitly put any approaches upon his (Grainger's) part in a dishonourable, or, at any rate, an unfair light. Therefore, was his deduction, it became him to try to bring matters to an issue before so formidable an obstacle could be thrown in his way.

Upon this conclusion he acted; but he had not proved a prosperous wooer. Though cautious, he had been persistent and bold—as bold as he well could be short of making an actual declaration. But withal, he was constrained to confess to himself that his wooing had not been successful, and that in a worse than merely negative sense. He had made his approaches under the guise of friendly sympathy, and in this way Blanche Vernon, in her gratitude of heart, had allowed him to become almost caressing towards her. But at length touches in his manner, when from time to time it became more or less uncontrollable, gave her a suspicion of the real nature of his feelings and meaning of his attentions, and then, of set purpose, and with an intention to be kind, she became cold towards him. In conversation with him she shrank from anything that savoured of more than the merest friendship, or




that it seemed to her might be intended to have more in it than met the ear ; and, so far as she could, she avoided seeing him alone.

Her suspicions did not go so far as the facts. She thought that the feeling of love which she had detected upon his part was a new feeling,—a feeling that had arisen since her father's death ; a love grown of the pity he had felt for their misfortunes. She believed she had noticed the earlier symptoms of it, and hoped, that by for a time assuming a reserved manner, she could give him to understand that he should not, for his own sake, allow the feeling to become a confirmed one. Gratitude towards him she felt abundantly ; but she had no spark of love for him, or for any, save Lionel Harding alone. She felt that to have listened to a word of love from another, to be anything but decisive in saying nay to it, should it be spoken, would be unfair


to that other, and traitorous to Lionel. At the same time she felt, too, that it would be hard—so hard that she might falter over it—to dash the hopes of one who had been so kind—as she viewed the matter—to her and hers. Her own love had probably sharpened her perception with regard to love in others. She saw not only that Grainger did love, but that he had within him a capability of loving *determinedly*, and there was, perhaps, just the shade of a vague fear mingling with the prudential reasoning, by which she brought herself to resolve to cool towards him,—to be cruel, to be kind.

She tried to make the change in her manner as little marked and abrupt as her object would allow; but Grainger was too close and sharp an observer not to at once perceive it, and guess pretty accurately at the intention of it and the grounds that had led to it. He felt exasperated by it,—exasperated against




Harding, the man but for whom, he said to himself, he could have won her fairly, without any of the scheming and cringing to which he had now to resort. But come what would, he mentally repeated, cursing his rival in his heart, he *would* win her, whether by fair means or others. But while his love for and determination to win her were rather increased than diminished by her altered manner, the feeling of assurance of ultimate success with which he had been buoyed was somewhat damped, despite all the promptings of his prideful self-will.

In this mood, and anxious to bring all means within his reach to bear, he proceeded to work upon Mrs Vernon to actively exert herself in his behalf, for he knew that she at least was as strongly in his favour as a woman could be. He knew that she had hopes of a restoration of the Vernons by means of a marriage between Blanche and him; and the notion



had often afforded him amusement, as he thought with a grim smile of how greatly mother-in-law and 'the family' would find themselves mistaken if they calculated upon using his money as they liked, for the enhancement of the family grandeur, while they made a cipher of him, as he had seen done in the case of other men of humble birth, who, having made money, had married into genteel families. He knew that she had a very high opinion of wealth, and a very contemptuous one of what she styled 'romantic nonsense,' under which latter head she would have placed any such idea as that of a young lady in her daughter's position preferring a poor to a rich husband. He knew that she would fight his battle as her own, would fight it with all the energy of a match-making mother of England; and he had little doubt that if she found that any little stroke of 'policy' would serve her purpose, she would resort to it, excus-




ing herself to herself on the plea that the end justified the means.

‘Did she know,’ he asked her one morning with an air of concern, ‘whether he had offended Miss Vernon in any way?’

‘No,’ she said, with a forced lightness of tone; ‘how could he suppose such a thing?’


‘Well, perhaps it *was* fancy,’ he said; ‘we were fanciful where we happened to be sensitive, but still he thought that Miss Vernon’s manner had become distant to him.’ He went on to say how grieved he would be if he found he really was in ill-grace with her of all persons in the world, and how happy he would be to do or undo anything by the commission or omission of which he had unconsciously incurred her displeasure. And he felt her coldness all the more, he concluded significantly, by reason of their having been on such friendly—and indeed of late, and in particular just before the change



in her bearing—such *more* than friendly terms.

This last, as was intended, gave Mrs Vernon the key to the situation, which struck her as being a more adverse one to Mr Grainger's—and her own—hopes, than she cared about admitting. She had not supposed that Blanche would cut short his first advances. On the contrary, she had calculated that, from a reluctance to offend or give pain to one who had done so much for them, she would submit to his attentions to an extent that could, if need were, be deftly pleaded against her, when he should fully declare himself. She had never made the mistake of thinking that Blanche would be brought to love Grainger, but she had thought she would let herself drift into such a position as would make a marriage with him seem an honourable necessity. 22

What Grainger told her not only upset this particular calculation, but, to her



mind, spoke but too meaningly of a determination upon her daughter's part that augured badly for the success of any other plan that might be tried to the same end. To Grainger, however, she continued to put a lighter face on the matter, and later the same day broke ground with her daughter.

'Why, Blanche,' she said, 'Mr Grainger has got hold of an idea that you have been cold with him of late.'

She spoke in a half-laughing kind of way, that implied that she of course knew that such an idea was a ridiculous one; but Blanche, her face instantly becoming grave, answered,—

'I have been guarded in my manner with him lately, but I am extremely sorry if my being so has annoyed or wounded him;—I sought to save, not inflict pain.'

'You speak in riddles, Blanche,' said the mother, with a well-assumed air of being astonished and perplexed. 'You

sought to save pain, and you have been guarded? what does it all mean? What was there to guard against?’

‘Have you not noticed *his* manner with me recently?’ asked Blanche.

‘I have only noticed that, as ever, it has been most kind.’

‘He has indeed been most kind, mamma,’ said Blanche, now speaking with evident emotion, ‘to me—to us all; and that is why this matter makes me so miserable, and at a loss how to act. I fear that his kindness has grown to a warmer—to—to love; that is the reason of my altered bearing.’

‘You *fear*!’ said the mother. ‘Really, Blanche, that sounds almost like affectation. Most young ladies would rejoice in, rather than fear, the prospect of such a suitor.’

‘Yes, if they felt that they could return his love, and were free to accept it.’

‘You take romantic views of these

things, Blanche,' said the mother, showing a shade of vexation in her manner.

'Possibly,' answered the daughter, somewhat sharply; 'but even those are better than artificial views.'

'Come now, Blanche,' said the mother, resuming her blander manner, 'don't let us fence, or get angry. I am very anxious about this matter, painfully anxious, and I will deal candidly with you about it. I have always thought that Mr Grainger regarded you with a more than merely friendly feeling, and I was glad to think so, especially after our great calamity had fallen upon us. A match with him would not only be a great good for you, but for us all. It would restore us to something like our former position, and enable us to, in a great measure, redeem our good name. You should think of that, and not let romantic notions induce you to throw away what—if offered—would, in all probability, be *the* opportunity of

your life. Mr Grainger is a man of the world,—he would not look for any gushing school-girlish love; and that being understood, you would be free to accept him, for I take it that you have a very high esteem and respect for him.'

'I have, mamma,' Blanche answered. 'But how can you say that I am free? I consider myself as engaged to Lionel.'

'Then you are very foolish, Blanche!' exclaimed the mother in a tone of irritation. 'In the first place, as a matter of fact, you are *not* engaged to him,—it was expressly understood that there was no engagement,—and, in the second place, you may depend upon it that when he comes to know of the alteration in your circumstances he will not look upon himself as engaged to you. I do not wish to speak against Mr Harding. I do him the justice of believing that he did not seek you simply because you were, as it appeared at that time, a highly advantageous

match for one in his position; but at the same time it is only common sense to suppose that that consideration had great weight with him, such weight that when he comes to know what has taken place, he will, it may be taken for granted, abandon the matter altogether, and in doing so he would be acting wisely for himself and kindly to you. Without a portion with you, he would only be able to go into business for himself on a petty scale, or perhaps would still have to continue shifting about as he does now, and in either case you would be condemned to a poverty that would not even be genteel, and with which you are not at all fitted to cope. Love in a cottage is no doubt a charming notion, but you may take my word for it that it is only realizable by those who have been brought up in a cottage, and been used to cottage life, and the management of a cottage income. When others attempt it they soon find it

a sorrowful mistake : there is grumbling, sometimes worse, upon the part of the husband ; unhappiness and discontent upon the part of the wife, and muddle and misery and disenchantment for both. Be guided by me, Blanche,—it is better to be warned by good advice than convinced by evil experience.'

Blanche's face flushed and paled as she listened to her mother's harangue, and her whole manner indicated that she was getting nervously excited ; and though she spoke proudly, her lips quivered as she briefly answered,

'You do Lionel an injustice.'

'Nay, Blanche,' said the mother, in a tone of remonstrance, 'it is imputing no wrong to a man who has seen something of the world, and has yet to make his way in it, to infer that he is not likely to allow sentiment to override prudence. Supposing that I have *not* done him an injustice ?'

Her daughter made no answer, and after waiting a little while she resumed—

‘Supposing he *does* take what most people as well as I would call the commonsense view of the matter. Or that—I hardly know how to put it, Blanche—that—that he didn’t care about having his name associated with ours on account—’

‘You *are* unjust to him, mamma,’ interrupted Blanche, choking down a sob as she spoke, ‘most unjust, and unkind to me. I cannot listen to such suggestions.’

‘They are not suggestions, they are only suppositions,’ said the mother, with an angry sneer; ‘and if they are unjust you have nothing to fear. Seeing how you are disposed, I am prepared to go as far as your father did, and promise that if when you and Mr Harding meet, you both wish to become engaged, I will not oppose, though I cannot approve of your doing so. But—and there can be no harm

in putting a possible contingency—if Mr Harding was to withdraw, as he honourably could, from the vague arrangement at present existing, would you then be willing to accept Mr Grainger as a suitor?’

‘You told me,’ said Blanche looking earnestly at her mother, and speaking with a calmness that was evidently the result of a strong effort of self-control, ‘you told me just now that you *always* thought that Mr Grainger had a more than friendly feeling towards me. Did you mean that you thought his feeling was of such a kind before we came here?’

‘Yes, from our first making his acquaintance.’

‘Did my father think so too?’

‘He did; and until this Mr Harding came among us he thought that you also could not but see that such was the case, and he hoped great things from it.’

‘Yes, I see it all now,’ murmured Blanche, her voice falling into a musing


dreamy tone. '*I might have saved him, and how willingly I would, if I had but known. Poor father! I wish, oh, how I do wish he had confided in me.*'

'Perhaps he would have been disappointed if he had,' said her mother.

'No, that he would not,' said Blanche, rising from her seat, and speaking with a passionate impulsiveness. 'Had I been fifty times engaged, had I stood at the very altar with the man of my heart, I would have turned from him, and have married Mr Grainger, or anybody, if by doing so I—'

Her voice suddenly failed her, and overcome by emotion, she sank back into her seat again, and covering her face with her hands, sobbed hysterically.


To the declaration that she would have willingly saved her father at any sacrifice of her own feelings she had intended to add that, not having been able to save him, she did not feel called upon to make



a loveless marriage for any comparatively paltry considerations; that, indeed, to do so would be a sin against her father's memory.

Mrs Vernon perhaps did not guess at the intended conclusion of her daughter's speech; at any rate, if she did, she ignored it. She really felt for her grief, but at the same time she saw in its softening influence her own opportunity, and firmly availed herself of it. Going over to Blanche and laying her hand caressingly upon her shoulder, she said in a soothing tone,

'Don't be distressed, dear,—I spoke hastily. I do believe that had your father confided in you our misfortunes would have been avoided, and that is why I speak to you now. I *do* confide in you. You may yet do much to repair the evil that has happened—so far as it is reparable. I hope I am not especially selfish,—I believe that if it so fell out that a sacrifice upon my part could serve us, I would cheerfully



make it. And really, Blanche, I do not think I am asking very much. It is not as though I suggested that you should wed some imbecile or repulsive old man, simply because he was rich, or one for whom you entertained a dislike. Mr Grainger is a fine man, in the prime of life, a man of mark, one of whom you might be proud, and he would make it the chief aim of his life to promote the happiness of yours. I said I would be candid with you, and I will. I am certain that on the slightest encouragement from you Mr Grainger would ask you to become his wife; and, so far as my wish or feeling may have any weight with you, it would give me sincere happiness to see you give him the encouragement.'

'But my promise—Lionel,' murmured Blanche brokenly, without raising her head.

'Well, well, Blanche,' said her mother in reply, 'I do think your notions are

Quixotic; still as they seem to be so firmly implanted in your mind, I'll respect them. I will only ask you to think favourably of Mr Grainger, in case you find that Mr Harding's views have changed with the change of circumstances, or that you yourself should come to think better of the matter. Will you yield even that much ?'

'But how could I meet Mr Grainger in the mean time, till—till Lionel returns to England.'

'If I may give him so much hope he will not, I am sure, embarrass you.'

'If you may give him hope!' exclaimed Blanche, quickly raising her head. 'Has he spoken to you explicitly, then ?'

'No ; so far as words went, he merely expressed himself afraid, as I have told you, that he had offended you ; but his manner left no reasonable doubt as to his full meaning, or as to his wishing me to intercede with you, and there can be as

little doubt that when we meet again he will ask me if I have spoken to you. That is why I ask you if I may give him the little hope that seems to be all you are willing to hold out.'

'You must tell him that *I* do not think Lionel will change.'

'But that if he does, you will accept him.'

'No ;—that I will think about it.'

'He might well say you were cold to him, Blanche.'

'What can I say? what can I do?' exclaimed Blanche, again covering her face and sobbing.

'Well, seeing how much he has done for us all, I think you might say something less icy.'

'Say, then,' she murmured, 'that I would try to bring myself to love him, and that I think I could, as I am very, very grateful to him, and esteem him as highly as it is possible to esteem any man.'

‘And you promise me, then, that you will try to bring yourself to think of him as a husband?’

‘If—if—’ Blanche stammered.

‘Oh yes, I quite understand,’ said the mother. ‘If Mr Harding leaves you free, have I your promise?’

‘Yes,’ said Blanche faintly, her face still hidden.

‘There, Blanche, you are a good girl,’ said her mother, stooping and kissing her on the forehead. ‘Don’t think me too hard or worldly. I know your age and mine look at these things differently; but believe me, I think I am acting for what will ultimately be the best for you. But you are agitated now,—I will leave you in quiet.’

The next day Grainger called upon Mrs Vernon, and after some commonplace discourse, came to the real object of his visit by asking in a tone that affected to be playful,

‘Well, do you know if I *have* got into Blanche’s black books?’

‘Well, I might answer yes and no,’ she replied, putting on a light tone in her turn; ‘the fact is, I find that she has assumed a coldness towards you of late, but only in order to avoid giving you offence.’

‘How is that?’

‘Can you not guess?’

‘Well, to leave beating about the bush, Mrs Vernon, I can,’ he answered, seriously. ‘I fancy that she has lately discovered what I think you saw before,—that I love her.’

‘That is it; but—’

‘What did she say?’ broke in Granger, impatiently.

In reply, Mrs Vernon gave him, after a fashion, an account of what had passed. Without actually suppressing or distorting facts, she managed, by a few deft touches, to make the interview appear to have

resulted far more favourably to Grainger's hopes than had really been the case. She left him to infer that Blanche felt herself constrained by a high-strained idea of the binding force of even an implied promise; that her wish to avoid having to answer any regular declaration existed only for the time being, and was in a great measure a matter of policy; and that if Harding did not come forward, the course of love would be smooth for him (Grainger). In conclusion, she expressed a very decided opinion that they should be troubled no more by Harding after he found that Blanche would be a penniless bride.

• 'But suppose the prospect of a penniless bride—when she is *such* a bride—does not cause him to draw back. Suppose he comes here and—and—well, let us say, throws himself upon Blanche's "high-strained idea of the binding force of even an implied promise." Suppose that,' said Grainger, who was too acute

not to perceive that Mrs Vernon's wish was, to a great extent, father of her thought on the point.

'There is very little danger of that,' she answered.

'Well, perhaps not; but still if it *did* so fall out?' he persisted.

'Why, in that case, I could only hope that Blanche's better sense would ultimately prevail.'

'But if not,—if her high-strained idea proved the stronger?'


'Why, then, I suppose things would have to take their course. But I feel sure that he will not come.'

'Well, no,' said Grainger, thoughtfully, and with a curious expression gathering over his face as he spoke, 'I hardly think he will.'

CHAPTER IV.

BURN-MY-HEART-OUT AT HOME.

AMONG the workpeople of the district of which he was trade king Mr Grainger was a very unpopular monarch. In their opinion he ruled them with a rod of iron, and they looked upon his system of government generally as an embodiment of the worst forms of 'the tyranny of capital.' They had not submitted quietly to his sway. There had been numerous strikes among them, 'strikes which he had always fought out to the bitter end, and always—so far as any substantial advantage was concerned—won. He had had spies in their camp; and, being fore-



warned of intended strikes, had been fore-armed against them,—had been able to mislead the enemy with regard to the terms of his contracts, so that when they had expected to have him on the hip in the matter of a time bargain, they had found him in a position to hold out long enough to starve them into capitulation, or, otherwise, had been prepared with some wholly unexpected *coup*, by which he had carried the day as if by storm.

Nor had he been a generous conqueror. ‘Woe to the vanquished!’ had been the principle he had gone upon. After each victory he had imposed some new law upon the defeated workmen that weighed more heavily upon them than those they had struck against; and though, being out-generaled, beaten, and disheartened, they submitted to his rule, they did it sullenly, and with hatred against him in their hearts. They heaped curses both loud *and* deep upon his name, and regarded his

presence among them as something pestilential, for his occasional personal visits to any of his works generally resulted in fault-finding, and the institution of further restrictions upon the operatives. He was perfectly aware of the estimation in which he was held, and upon the whole was rather gratified by it than otherwise.

‘They don’t fancy me at any price,’ he would say, with a grim smile; ‘I’m one too many for them. I haven’t been behind the scenes for nothing. They’ve found that I can take the devil out of them if they try to kick over the traces with me: I know every move of their own game better than most of them know it themselves, while they never know mine till they’re beaten by it. As to their not liking me, *that* don’t matter much. I don’t pay them to like me; and so as I get my pen’orth out of them for what I do pay them for—and I’ll take particular notice that I do that—I don’t care for the rest.’

Such being the state of feeling between employer and employed, the workmen at the Hopewell forges regarded as very bad news indeed the intelligence that 'Gaffer' Grainger had taken a lease of the works from the son of the late proprietor, who (the son) being left very rich, and having 'swell' notions, did not care about carrying on the business after his father's death.

With their general knowledge of Grainger's practice, the men had but too sufficient reason to look upon the circumstance of his becoming their master as something in the nature of a calamity. Their late master's relations with them had been widely different from those of Grainger's with his workpeople. He had paid the best wages and piece-work prices in the district; he had built streets of superior cottages for his workmen; had established a reading-room and library for their use, together with a system of evening classes for those of them who were desirous of

advancing their general or acquiring technical education ; and day-schools for their children. Each year he had paid for a day's excursion for them and their families to any spot which the majority had chosen ; and he had always given them substantial encouragement and support in such 'movements' among themselves as the formation of a preliminary savings' bank, and of sick and clothing clubs, and workshop-bands.

The natural result of all this was that the Hopewell workmen were socially of a superior class. As a body they were better educated, more intelligent, more energetic, independent, and self-reliant than most of those around them. Isolated from the amusements and other distracting influences of large towns, they were more given to reading, and to the study of 'questions of the day,'—and especially of those that more particularly affected the interests of their own class—than is gener-

ally the case with working men. They had a discussion society, in which politics were *not* forbidden; in which, on the contrary, they were the chief topics of debate; and many of the members of the society showed a knowledge of the subjects discussed, and a readiness and clearness in setting forth their views upon them, that *some* Members of Parliament might have envied.

The mechanics among them were, almost to a man, trade unionists, and though there were lodges in the Union numerically greater than the Hopewell one, there was none more powerful in point of 'moral weight.' Radical changes in the constitution of the Union had originated there, as had also some of the most important 'movements' that the Union had been successful in carrying out.

The general secretary of the Union had been a Hopewell man, and the Hope-

well delegates had invariably distinguished themselves.

The members of the lodge had always subscribed liberally to strikes to which they had given the sanction of their votes, and its officers had on more than one occasion been the behind-the-scenes wire-pullers of strike movements in their own neighbourhood. They had never had occasion to strike themselves, but they were in a position to do so with greater effect and fairer prospects of being able to carry their point, than any other body of their craft that could have been selected in that part of the country. In such a matter they would move as one man. Many of them were, for their position in life, men of considerable means, and they were certain of powerful support—of the pecuniary assistance and moral influence of their own trade at large, and of other trades too. If any body of workmen might hope to wage war successfully

against the hated, but hitherto all-victorious, 'Gaffer,' it was they—and they knew it. Though, when they heard that he was coming amongst them as an enemy—that was, a master—they were troubled, they were not dismayed.

They at once proceeded to take timely counsel together as to how they should meet the attack which they knew would speedily be made upon them. A special summoned meeting of the lodge was called, and having been resolved into a committee, fell to considering the pros and cons of the situation that had arisen. The general result of their deliberations ran: 'that they could hardly expect to get another such master as the one they had lost, that any new comer would probably curtail some of their advantages, that to any reasonable degree of such curtailment they would submit ungrudgingly, but that if Grainger attempted to enforce the scale of pay-

ments, and some other details, of the system he carried out in his other establishments, they would resist, even to the extent of striking.' And as there could be little doubt that Grainger would try to enforce the obnoxious points, they appointed a sub-committee, with Burn-my-heart-out as its secretary, for provisionally organizing the strike.

Mr Grainger's intentions in the matter were soon definitely made known. On the very day on which the establishment came fully under his control notices were posted in the various departments, intimating that in a month from that date day wages would be lowered, and piece-work prices reduced in certain specified ratios; that three hours would be added to the number required to constitute a week's work; that at the expiration of the notice each workman would be expected to sign a code of workshop rules embodying those and other alterations,

and that any man refusing to sign would be regarded as discharging himself from the employ.

To these terms the Unionists unhesitatingly decided they would not consent, and Burn-my-heart-out and his committee went vigorously to work to organize their means of resistance. On the evening succeeding the one on which The Parson and Stephen Barber had held their conversation, this committee was to meet to agree to the report which they were to submit to a general meeting summoned for the following night.

Burn-my-heart-out had stayed from work in the afternoon to draft the heads of the report, and arrange a lot of correspondence he had received, and having got through his work by about five o'clock, was just going to take an early cup of tea with his wife. He was standing with his back to the fire looking down at her as she set out the tray, and the impression the

pair would have made upon any one seeing them at that moment for the first time would probably have been one of amusement. He stood fully six feet, and showed a breadth of shoulder and chest remarkable even in a man of that height. His head was proportionately large, and his features massive. The jaw square and heavy, the cheek-bones prominent, the nose large, and brows overhanging, and all so stiffly cut that save when the face was lit up by the light of his black flashing eyes, its expression seemed stolid. He was 'cleaned up,' and the closely-fitting rather sportingly cut suit of dark tweed showed off limbs quite in keeping with his frame, the arms in particular being noticeable for their great muscular development.

The wife, on the other hand, was barely five feet high, and slightly built for that stature. She was very pretty, with features just sufficiently irregular to be piquant; light golden hair, and large



dreamy light blue eyes, in which might be read indications of both capability of affection and a nervously sensitive temperament. It was easy to see that she was delicate. She had never been of a robust constitution, and since her marriage she had suffered from more than one severe illness; and at this time she was palpably in that state 'in which ladies wish to be who love their lords,' a circumstance that perhaps accounted for her looking unusually wan and weakly.

A noticeable big man in any company, her husband appeared a veritable Samson in contrast with her littleness, while the look of loving interest with which he followed her movements might easily have been mistaken for one of slavish uxoriousness; but any such idea as the latter would have been speedily removed from the mind of any person who could have seen how, as she completed the setting out of the table, she looked up and met his

loving glance with eyes that spoke again. Such a looker-on would have seen that theirs was a case of strong mutual love, not of a foolishly fond affection on the one side, and indifference and domestic tyranny on the other.

‘Ready, Matey?’ he said, as he caught her glance.

‘Yes, quite ready now, Jim,’ she answered, motioning him to be seated.

She poured out the tea in silence, and both of them seemed thoughtful. They had sat without speaking for a minute or two, when the husband putting down his cup exclaimed:—

‘Oh, hang it, Matey, don’t let us fall into the mopes just now; it ain’t often we have our tea together on a week day, and it seems ungrateful not to try to be cheery when we do. You mustn’t let this make you downhearted. It likely won’t last long, and even if it does we’re pretty well provided: we shall have our own savings

as well as the club pay to fall back upon.

‘That’s very well, Jim, so far,’ she said, shaking her head, and making no return to the forced smile with which his words were accompanied; ‘but that’s only one thing. Strikes bring trouble in a many ways; they’re bad things, to my way of thinking, and I can’t help feeling anxious at the thoughts of this one.’

And she did indeed feel anxious, more anxious than even her husband suspected, though he knew that the subject had troubled her sorely. She knew that strikes in that district had often led to wild work—to riot, violence, and bloodshed, and she feared lest her husband should be drawn into anything of the kind.

On more than one occasion, when he had been discussing the proposed strike with fellow-workmen who had called in upon him, she had heard him speak with a hot-blooded passionateness that savoured but too significantly of the reckless, dare-

devil Burn-my-heart-out of the old unregenerate days; and this, though she did not speak of it, was the point which troubled her most. Though, thanks to his love for her, and to her loving management and watchfulness, his way of life had altered so much for the better, she knew that the old Adam was yet strong within him,—so strong that excitement or provocation of a combative character might possibly, she feared, lead to its reasserting its sway and plunging him into some grievous difficulty.

As he quite agreed in the generalities embodied in what his wife had said, but at the same time did not wish to seem to speak against the coming strike, Burn-my-heart-out made no immediate reply, and, as the wife made no further remark, there again ensued a silence which this time was broken by a knock at the door. The husband answered it, and found that the caller was no other than The Parson.

‘Oh, come in, sir,’ he said, a smile brightening up his face as he spoke.

In compliance with this invitation The Parson entered, but seeing them at tea; he stopped on the threshold, exclaiming,—

‘Oh, I was not aware you were at tea; I’m sorry to have disturbed you; I’ll look in again a little later.’

‘Oh no, sir,—no disturbance,’ said Burn-my-heart-out, while his wife rose and held out her hand to take The Parson’s hat, ‘no disturbance, sir. Will you take a cup with us? You’ll be kindly welcome, you know, sir,’ he went on, seeing that his visitor seemed to hesitate.

‘I know that, Jim,’ The Parson answered, ‘and, as I want to have a little talk with you, I will take a cup with you, if Mrs Harrison here is quite sure that I will not be imcommoding her.’

‘That you wouldn’t, sir, at any time,’ she answered; ‘and just now I’m very glad indeed you’ve come. We were talk-

ing about this strike that they are getting up, and I know you don't think well of strikes any more than I do.'

While she had been speaking she had set another cup, and poured out the tea, and The Parson was taking his seat at the table as he answered,—

'Well, I suppose, Mrs Harrison, there are two sides to every question; but I do think that strikes are an evil.'

'Well, they are, sir,' said Burn-my-heart-out; 'but sometimes they are necessary evils, and I do think, speaking fairly, that ours will be one such.'

'Well, I don't know, Jim,' said his wife; 'I've hardly ever known them to do any good, and I have known them to do a deal of harm. Besides, not speaking of what people have to suffer while they last, and the ill-will they make, the men generally have to go in just as they came out, and sometimes on worse terms.'

'All that may be, Matey,' answered

the husband; 'but then, there is another way of looking at the question. Any particular strike, or a dozen particular strikes, may be lost as far as concerns the exact things the men have come out about; but it doesn't follow that they've been altogether without gain. They all show that if working-men only think they're going to be trodden upon they'll turn, and a strike, you must remember, costs even the winners something—quite enough to make them think twice before risking bringing one on. When people say men shouldn't strike, and point to their having lost this or that strike, they should ask themselves what condition the working classes would have been likely to have been in by this time if there had never been strikes among them. There is no doubt, as The Parson says, about them being an evil; the question is whether they are not the least of two evils.'

'Well, to take up your own phrase,

Jim,' said The Parson, 'wouldn't the law of supply and demand protect working-men from being trodden upon?'

'Well, I don't know that it would, sir,' he answered. 'There is a great deal of talk about this law of supply and demand, and of course there is something in it, but not near so much, it strikes me, as many people think—at any rate, not in this country, and in the present day. We trade Unionists know more about that point than some people, who fancy they know a deal more than us. Men ain't like provisions or goods,—it don't always pay them to be rushed off to the dearest market, if that market is only a temporary one.'

'I don't quite catch your drift,' Jim,' said The Parson.

'Well, sir, it's this way; in ordinary times there are always more than a sufficient number of hands to carry on the trade of the country; but we'll suppose,



say, that a prospect of a war causes a flush of trade. Ship-building, armour-plate making, and all that kind of thing gets tremendously busy, and in the districts where those trades are carried on they are shopping all the hands they can get, and are giving them three or four shillings a week more than is being paid to men of the same trade, say, in this district. Do you think it would pay a steady married man from here to go rushing off to there? Why, of course it wouldn't! As soon as the flush was over—and they never last long—the extra hands would be sacked, and we should find ourselves out of work there, and our old jobs taken up here. We know all that well enough, and so do masters, so that we couldn't even use such things as a screw for forcing our wages up. The law of supply and demand may come out very well, taken through and through, and all the world over; but you may take my word for it,—it doesn't

fit into the circumstances of every case. The existing relations between capital and labour are fighting ones, and the side that doesn't keep itself in fighting trim, and show practically that it is "aye ready" — no matter how previous fights may have gone against it — *will* be trodden upon.'

'Well, I dare say there is a good deal in your view of the question, Jim,' said The Parson, 'still that ground is too large an one for us to go over now, though, as I expect you have guessed, it's about the strike that I have come to speak to you.'

'Yes, I was thinking as much, sir,' the other answered, for they had had some talk on the subject before, and it was well known that The Parson took an active interest in all such matters occurring in the district. This interest in trade affairs was another point that made him popular among the people. While he never hesi-

tated to express his opinions to the workmen, and that in very decided terms, when he considered them in the wrong over a strike, he as unhesitatingly and plainly expressed his opinions to the masters when he thought them in the wrong. At the same time he never allowed his views upon the merits of the trade phase of the question to interfere with his efforts to assist the women and children when, as frequently happened, a strike brought want into the homes of the workmen engaged in it. On several occasions he had been successful in negotiating a peaceful arrangement of disputes between employers and employed; and in conducting such negotiations he had shown that he had made it a point of honour to so handle information intrusted to him as to give no unfair advantage to either party, should his efforts in favour of peace prove ineffective.

'Of course,' resumed The Parson after a brief pause, 'I would like to see a strike prevented if possible.'

'Of course, sir,' the other answered, 'and so would we, *if possible*.'

'Do you think that it is impossible, then?'

'I think it very unlikely, sir, very unlikely indeed. We have quite made up our minds, and you know Gaffer Grainger is not the man to knock under without a fight.'

'No, that he isn't,' said the wife, 'as those who have tried to fight against him know to their sorrow. He's always got the best of the men in the strikes, and only made it worse for them after they were over.'

'That's right enough so far, Matey,' said her husband, 'but still we mustn't let it daunt our courage. Because he never has been beaten in a strike, that's not to say he never will be, or can be. You



know,' he went on with a slight smile, 'he has been beaten in other things, and perhaps his day has come to be beaten in a strike; in fact, I very much think it has.'

'But you men wouldn't strike simply because you thought you were strong enough to win, or in a mere spirit of defiance?' questioned The Parson.

'No, honour bright, sir, we don't want to strike if we can avoid it.'

'Well, I heard you were going to offer some compromise before you did strike.'

'We are, sir.'

'May I ask what are the terms of it?'

'Well, we'll agree to the additional three hours a week, to half of the proposed reduction in the day wages, and to piece-work being done away with altogether.'

'And that, I suppose, you consider a pretty fair splitting of the difference?'


'Yes, sir, we do; so fair, that we will only agree to them on conditions.'

'Oh, conditions!' said The Parson,

with a rather rueful look. 'To what effect?'

'Well, sir, you see at his other works he won't have Union men: if there were Unionists at them when they came into his hands, he got rid of them by ones and twos as quickly as he conveniently could; and we want to protect ourselves against that. The first of our conditions is that he mustn't discharge any Union man just because he is a Union man, and the other is, that he mustn't try either directly or indirectly to force the truck system upon us.'

'Well, Jim,' said The Parson slowly, after taking a thoughtful sip or two at his tea, 'I can't say that I think the terms unreasonable in themselves, but looking at the particular circumstances of the case, are they reasonable in the sense of there being a fair chance of their being ceded? It is no disparagement to Mr Grainger to say—nor do I say it disparagingly—that where he thinks he can carry a point he




won't yield it on any mere ground of principle or sentiment,—won't yield it, in fact, unless he thinks that he is likely to be compelled to do so if he refuses. So far, I take it, you quite agree with me?'

'Quite,' answered the other, with a slight smile.

'Well, then, knowing his character so far, and knowing too his great wealth, and his unvarying success in previous strikes—knowing all this, Jim, do you honestly think that the workmen are in a position to force him to terms? because if they are not, they had better accept his arrangements, however hard they may appear to them.'

'But honestly, sir,' answered Burn-my-heart-out with unmistakable sincerity of tone, 'I do believe we are in a position to force him to terms. However hot we may feel against him, we've laid our plans coolly, and haven't forgotten to take his strength into account.'



The Parson again sipped at his now cold tea by way of gaining a little pause for thought, and then looking up, said, 'Of course you are the best judges of your own means and intentions. My motive for going into the matter with you is this,—I shall be dining with Grainger and Barber this evening, and I would very much like to be able to throw a little oil on the troubled waters that seem to be rising among you. Do you think, now, that I might in a general way fairly put it to him that this strike, if it takes place, will be a far more powerfully organized one on the part of the men than any that has hitherto taken place hereabout,—so powerful, in fact, that it might be worth his while to consider whether it would not *pay* him better to yield a little rather than risk it.'


'Yes, sir,' answered Burn-my-heart-out emphatically, 'you may safely say that much, and be well within the mark.'

If he doesn't yield a little he may have to yield a good deal. If we do come out we shall more likely than not try to make one strike do for all, and have it out with him about his system all over the district.'

He paused for a minute evidently debating some point, and then looking up with an air of resolve, resumed:—'Look here, sir, I know you wouldn't do anything that wasn't fair, and so in confidence I'll show you how we stand, and then you can judge for yourself whether or not we aren't justified in considering ourselves in a position to make a good fight.'

As he finished speaking he passed into an adjoining room, from which he presently returned with an armfull of letters and papers. Laying them on a little side-board he took up one packet of letters, and showing them to The Parson, said, 'These are from every branch of our Union throughout the kingdom sanctioning the strike, and promising to support

us, and to keep men in their districts from coming here. These,' he said, taking up another bundle of letters, 'are from the Unions of other trades, approving of our intentions, and promising us help. These,' he went on, picking up a small packet consisting of some three or four letters, 'are from the French, and Belgian, and other foreign branches of The Workmen's International Association, promising to use their influence to prevent men from being brought from those parts. This,' he continued, showing a sheet of foolscap, 'is the writing of a circular showing up Grainger's system, and what *he* has done for the working classes. It will be printed, if the strike comes off, and sent to all the leading newspapers, and circulated wherever he is in the least likely to try to get men. And beside all that, we have arranged so that we can either draw out the men from his other works, or let them




stop in and help us with money, just as may suit us best.'

'Well, as such things go I must admit that you are well prepared,' said The Parson, rising as the other finished speaking, 'but that only makes me hope the more that it will not come to a strike.'

'And that's what I hope too, most sincerely,' said the wife with an anxious look.

'Well, you may depend upon it, Mrs Harrison, I will do all in my power to prevent it,' he said, speaking with a marked kindliness of tone, but in any case you mustn't let the matter trouble you overmuch—you must take care of your health, you know. And now,' he concluded, putting on his hat and moving towards the door, 'I'll wish you good afternoon, and I shall still hope for the best—that is, for peace.'



CHAPTER V.

ON STRIKE.

AN hour later The Parson was seated at dinner in company with Grainger, Barber, and young Vernon, Grainger, in pursuance of his plan of trying to cultivate Blanche Vernon through her relatives, now often asking her brother to his table. While the parson was yet watching for an opportunity of introducing the subject of the impending strike, Grainger himself unexpectedly came direct to it.

‘Heard anything definite as to what the Hopewell lot are going to be at?’ he asked of Barber.

‘No, nothing definite,’ the latter an-

swered; 'I suppose they are going to show fight, but in what manner or to what extent I can't say.'

'Have you heard anything, Vernon?—you are on the ground,' said Grainger, turning to him.

'No, nothing has been said to me, but still it's easy to see that they are taking counsel together.'

'Counsel of war, eh?' said Grainger, smiling at his own small joke.

'It's counsel that will be well kept,' said Barber; 'it's the Union men that are managing the matter.'

'It will be the last matter they will manage there,' said Grainger meaningly.

'Well, to judge by the dissatisfied and defiant looks they cast upon the printed notices and we officials,' said Vernon, 'there will certainly some of them refuse to sign the new rules.'

'It won't be that way, Sidney,' said Barber; 'they are not the sort to deal in

half-measures : what they do will be done on the all or none principle, and my own idea is that they will all strike.'


'I don't think they want to strike,' said The Parson. 'On the contrary, I believe they wish to avoid doing so, and intend suggesting a compromise with that view.'

'Ah, well ! this is a land of liberty,' said Grainger sneeringly ; 'there is no law against suggesting.'

'But to avoid a strike, and especially such a strike as they would make, would you not be inclined to come to terms with them ?'

'Yes, my own terms, but not theirs,' answered Grainger.

He spoke with a lowering brow, and with a just perceptible inclination to snubbing in the tone of his voice ; and seeing that this manner of his employer brought a half-angry flush on The Parson's face, Barber, with a view to giving the



latter a moment in which to put his temper under restraint, asked,

‘Have you any notion of the nature of the proposals they think of making?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, and proceeded to explain them as Burn-my-heart-out had stated them to him. ‘In my opinion,’ he concluded, ‘they show that the men are sincerely desirous of a peaceful settlement, and at any rate I think they are so far reasonable that they might very advantageously be discussed.’

‘Well, Mr Graham,’ said Grainger, with a conciliatory smile, as if tacitly apologizing for his previous brusqueness, ‘I would quite admit your last point, if I as well as the men had a compromise in view; but I have no such idea, and, indeed, have specially and deliberately made up my mind against it, so that discussion would be mere waste of time. Discussion in these matters can only be of use in cases in which both parties have doubts and

fears, and I have neither now. I had them, and then I did discuss the whole affair—discussed it very earnestly with Barber here, who put points to me that would have disposed me to compromise if I hadn't held a card that I believe will trump the strongest they can play.'

'Mr Grainger,' answered The Parson gravely, 'I don't want to preach at a dinner-table; but as we are upon the subject, and as I am anxious, very anxious, to see this matter amicably arranged, I would just remind you that there is a higher standpoint from which, as well as others, it should be considered. I speak of sure knowledge in saying that if you insist upon carrying out the provisions of your notice as it stands there will be a strike—a strike that will in all probability bring severe sufferings upon women and children; that may, perhaps, as strikes have done before, lead to crime and bloodshed, and that will certainly give rise to

bitter ill-feeling. Now, if by concessions equitable in themselves a man can prevent such a state of things, he owes it not only to society and his own ultimate peace of mind, but to an infinitely higher power, to do so, notwithstanding that he may be in a position to outbrave any attempts to force the concessions from him. Speaking simply on this ground, and with no wish to unduly meddle in business, I do think you might at least take the proposals of the men into consideration. What they ask is not much.'


Mr Grainger had listened with evident impatience, and to Barber, who understood him best, and was still observing him closely, it was also evident that it was only by placing a strong curb on his temper that he restrained himself from some violent outburst. As it was, he made no attempt to disguise a scoffing tone, as he answered—

'Ah, that is all very fine, Mr Graham



—for you. But you see I'm differently situated in the matter. The high standpoint view is in your line, and is a cost-me-nothing one to you; but it doesn't do in business, and would be a dear one to me. If society likes to come forward and pay my men extra wages to prevent a strike it can do so, but I can't see that on any other ground I owe it any duty, except to pay twenty shillings in the pound, and that duty it takes care I discharge. As to what the men ask not being much, I must altogether differ with you. It is a great deal—thousands a year—to me. Besides, if I gave it to one set of men I would have to give it to others, and even from a high standpoint you know you shouldn't show a bad example.

After his one momentary gleam of anger, The Parson had studiously remembered that practically he was upon a mission of peace, and that it was not for him to endanger any possible chance of



its being brought about by resenting any little unpleasantness of manner towards himself. There was, therefore, no shade of annoyance, or of a mere spirit of opposition, in either his tone or look, as by way of reply to Grainger he observed,

‘ Well, leaving the high standpoint and coming to your own strictly business view, might it not be worth your while to weigh the other side of the last point you mention?’

‘ I don’t quite understand.’

‘ Well, I don’t say it will be the case, but the Hopewell men might be successful in their strike.’

‘ Yes, they *might*,’ interrupted Grainger with a shrug and a smile that seemed to say, ‘and the moon *might* be made of green cheese.’

‘ Precedent is altogether against them, I know,’ resumed The Parson in the same unruffled tone; ‘ but still all things are possible, and they might; and if they did,

might not that be far worse for you in respect to your other works than giving them the terms they ask for now would be, or might not the fact of their striking at all lead to similar movements in other works ?'

'Well, as you say, all things are possible, and your string of "might nots" among them,' answered Grainger, in the same scoffing, sneering tone, 'but they are such very improbable possibilities, that it's not worth while to waste a thought upon them. The men at the other shops have had a taste or two of what I am in these sort of things, and if the Hopewell gang try on any of their agitator tricks with me they'll get such a taste as will sicken them.'

The Parson saw that his efforts were useless; that to press them further might be worse than useless, and exclaiming with a half-sigh, 'Ah! well, it's a pity these affairs cannot be arranged in some less

disastrous way,' he let the subject drop. Later in the night, however, when Barber and he were walking home together, he came back to it again for a moment.


'It is to be a strike, then?' he said.

'It is, if its not being depends upon his yielding anything without a fight.'

'And what is this strong card of his?'

'That I don't know. I suppose it is something the strength of which lies more or less in its being secret and sudden, and he always acts upon the safe principle that a secret is never known to two. Whatever it is, he is very confident about it, and you may depend upon it that he will play it with as much of startling effect as he can possibly manage.'

'Well, yes,' said The Parson, with a slight smile; 'tremendously practical as he is in a general way, he is nothing if not melodramatic in these things; and, to be melodramatic too for a moment, I will just say, in quitting the matter, that I shall be




neither surprised nor sorry if over this case he at last finds that a time *has* come.'

In pursuance of the programme they had arranged for themselves, the Hopewell workmen sent a deputation to Mr Grainger, to propose their offer of compromise, but he declined to receive them. He had fully considered the matter before issuing his notice, he curtly sent word through a clerk, and by that notice he intended to abide.

This answer, it was decided at a meeting of the Unionists, left the men but one course. When the new rules were presented for signature they all—Unionists and Non-Unionists, mechanics and labourers, every man on the ground—refused to sign, and the news went forth that the Hopewell men had 'come out on strike.'


One respect in which the Hopewell men were better circumstanced than most others in the district was in regard to housing. The workmen's cottages in other villages,

though tolerably roomy, were, as a rule, of a very rude type of architecture, and sadly lacking in sanitary appliances. But the Hopewell cottages, which were arranged in blocks, forming three sides of a square, in addition to being of good size, were built in a pretty and substantial style, and with great regard to comfort and cleanliness. They were well drained, well supplied with water, gas-lit, and had properly fitted-up clothes drying grounds attached. The footway in front of them was smoothly flagged and the roadway well paved. Each house had a neatly railed-in flower-plot, and by a judicious annual expenditure of paint upon railings, doors, and window-frames, a general brightness and freshness of outward appearance was maintained. They were really model cottages, and had tenants worthy of them—tenants who vied with each other in keeping their flower-plots trim and the interior of their houses bright,



cleanly, and nicely and comfortably furnished. The cottages belonged to the estate, and had been erected from the plans, and under the direction, of the late proprietor, and, under a family arrangement, were the property of two maiden sisters of his.


‘The Ladies,’ as these sisters were called, were exceedingly popular with their tenants, and not without good reason, as whenever occasion required or opportunity offered they were very kind to them, and always showed a warm interest in their welfare. If any of them were unable to pay their rent for a few weeks, ‘The Ladies’ never pressed them at the time, and subsequently allowed them to pay off arrears as gradually as they chose. Were any of them sick, and ordered to take nourishment, they would send them wine and spirits from their own cellar, and delicacies from their own table; and they not only in a great measure supported, but



took an active part in the management of, the schools in which the children of the workmen were educated.


Thus, so far as their connection with their employer had been concerned, the Hopewell men had been as happy in their home as in their workshop life. They had been almost like a large family, with their master and his family as its heads; and the knowledge that, apart from what might take place in the workshop, these kindly social relations between master and men would be at an end, had been an additional reason why they had heard, with a feeling akin to horror, of Grainger having taken the works.

The men had come out on the Saturday of a 'big reckoning'—the 'reckoning' on which the piece-work men drew their monthly surplus over day wages. Though not avowedly a holiday, the Monday following a big reckoning was, to a great extent, practically taken as one by



the workmen of the district, who sacrificed to St Monday in such manner as seemed good to them. On the Monday following the Saturday on which the Hopewell men came out, this custom was observed even more extensively than usual, so far as staying away from work went; but there was little of the holiday spirit abroad. It was perfectly understood that the strike was to be made a touchstone for the whole of Grainger's works; that any day it might extend to them all, either by a call out upon the part of the strike leaders, or a lock-out upon that of the employer. The strike, therefore, was the all-absorbing topic of discourse; and to working men taking part, or likely to have to take part in it, a strike is anything but a holiday or inspiring subject.

At a lodge meeting of the Unionists on the Saturday night, an open-air meeting of workmen had been arranged for midday on Monday. It was to be held on a piece



of waste land in the rear of the Hopewell cottages; and on this piece of ground a large and motley crowd was assembled at the time appointed—a crowd consisting mostly of men, but sprinkled with women, and largely accompanied by dogs, which, despite the careful watch and ward of their owners, occasionally succeeded in getting up a free fight among themselves. It was a crowd worth a passing study—such a crowd as could only be seen in the black-country.

Place aux dames! Let us look at the women first. They are moving freely about among the men—moving about among them with a strikingly manly air and gait. It is evident that it is no mere female curiosity that has drawn them there. It is easy to see that they understand the matter in hand, and they are discussing it with even greater vehemence than the men, and as though they had some direct personal interest in the issue

of it, as indeed they have, for they are the 'Pit Bank (in local dialect 'bonk') Girls.' As the attendants in racing stables are always 'boys,' so the bank girls of the black-country are always 'girls,' though they are of all ages, from sixteen to sixty, and are many of them wives and mothers. They follow an occupation that would be laborious for men, and work for a wage that men would scorn. They are employed on the banks of the Ironstone pits, receiving the 'skips' as they 'come to bank,' and sorting the ore out from the shale; and their exposed position on the tops of the high, bleak banks necessitates a half-masculine costume. Over their gowns they wear men's coats, and their feet and legs are protected by heavy high-ankled boots, and stout leather leggings; and from their limbs being thus encased, and their having to walk about on the rough loose banks, they acquire a masculine stride, which, as any looker-on at the

strike meeting would have seen, sticks to them when away from work. In their working clothes they look strange figures; but many people would be inclined to regard them as still more remarkable figures when 'cleaned up,' as was the case with them at the meeting. They are fearfully and wonderfully dressed in such unconscious burlesques of *outré* fashions as would be more than sufficient to at once and for ever extinguish such modes, could they but have been seen by ladies of fashion. Their chignons are in most cases considerably larger than their by no means small heads; as a rule they differ decidedly in shade from their natural hair, and are palpably not made of hair, but of dyed wool, oakum, and other materials of a like kind; while their 'Grecian bends' are suggestive of humps—and anything but symmetrical ones. And then the colours of their costumes! The quantity, and not only no-harmony but positive *dis*-harmony of them!


The flaring red and blue dresses ; the plaid and variegated shawls, and hats, and bonnets, made up of lumps of red, blue, and bright 'yaller,' thrown together anyhow ! A sight of them in this respect would be calculated to give a fit to any person of extra-refined artistic sensibilities ; but after all, they do not look much more ridiculous than do sometimes those who set the fashions they try to ape : and happily they do not see themselves as others see them, and regard their dress as being undoubtedly 'the thing.' They are stalwart women, somewhat short, it is true, but erect, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and stout-limbed, with large, squarely-cut features, and dark, weather-bronzed complexions. Altogether they are much more Amazonian than handsome—such 'girls' as would only strike people of considerable imaginative power as being of the *softer* sex.

Living so near the meeting place, some of the Hopewell men have come in dis-

habille—in old loose-fitting ‘house’ coats, slippers, or boots cut down at the heel to serve as slippers, old soft felt or cloth caps, in keeping with the coats, and with bare throats. Others, again, are in clean working dress ; but the majority are ‘cleaned up’ in their ‘second best’ clothes, the prevailing characteristic of which is a sporting cut. The garments of some of the young men, especially those with dogs, are of loud check patterns, while others of somewhat quieter tastes wear plain dark tweed. But with all the trowsers are tight-fitting, and the ‘cut-away’ coats, much be-pocketed, be-flapped, and be-braided, while their more or less—as a rule more *than* less—mosaic breast-pins and alberts run very large, and are of ‘loud’ patterns. With the older men velveteen coats and yellowish woollen cord trowsers are the general wear, and they do not ‘sport’ jewelry ; but many, both of them and of the young men, have gaudy shawl-

patterned 'mufflers,' tied loosely about their throats over their neck-ties and collars.

The number of maimed and deformed men among the crowd tell with a but too painful plainness of the frequency of accidents in mining and other black-country employments; but those who have suffered nothing from such occurrences are, as a body, finely-formed men, large of frame, and with great muscular development. Generally speaking, their features and the expression thereof are somewhat heavy, but here and there are countenances which unmistakably indicate a more than average degree of intelligence. Many of the men exhibit a pallidness of hue that shows strangely in conjunction with the massive frames and general appearance of robust health with which the white faces are associated. These are the miners, who are pale from working under-ground, or forgermen, whose pallor arises from the tremen-



dous sweatings to which their employment subjects them. The complexions of the others are, for the most part, swarthy, and some of them even grimy.

As to the dogs, like their masters' garments, they are of a sporting kind, ranging from toy terriers, that are heard growling in coat-pockets, to the largest breeds of bull-dogs.

One corner of the meeting ground had at some time been used as a place of deposit for furnace slag, over a mound of which a layer of earth and thin grass had in course of time accumulated, forming a tolerably level top. A few minutes after twelve there was a sudden concentration of the crowd towards this spot, a movement that was explained by the appearance upon the mound of Burn-my-heart-out, and some half-dozen others of the strike leaders. They were received with a roaring cheer, which was followed by an attentive silence, in the midst of which Burn-my-heart-out

came forward to speak. He looked pale, haggard, depressed, and absent-minded—looked, in fact, much more like a man who required inspiriting, than one who was by his manner and example likely to inspire others. His dejected appearance was noticed immediately he stepped out from his companions; and a low murmur of displeased surprise ran through some parts of the crowd.

‘Surely he ain’t going to funk on it already?’ said one, in a tone of inquiry, to a Hopewell man.

‘Funk on it!’ exclaimed the questioned man, turning a contemptuous look upon the other; ‘no, Jim ain’t the sort to funk on anything he goes in for. If all hands only stick to it as well as him, there won’t be much fear of us winning.’

‘Well, it’s easy to see he’s knocked out of time over something,’ said the other; ‘what’s the matter?’

‘Matter enough, my lad, and where he

can feel it most, answered the Hopewell man. 'His wife was brought to bed on Thursday, and has been dreadful bad. The child died, and they thought at one time it was all over with her, and now they can't say as she's out of danger. My missis has been helping to nurse her, and she tells me, Jim has never had his clothes off the whole of the time, and fretted so, till they thought he must 'a gone off his head. He must be a rare plucked 'un to be here at all to-day, let alone you talking about his going to funk it.'

The same explanation had probably been given by other Hopewell men, for the murmur was followed by another ringing cheer, in which a special tone of encouragement and sympathy could be plainly detected. Those who were near enough to observe the working of his face, could see that Burn-my-heart-out understood and appreciated the intention of the cheer, and that it nerved him. When silence was

again restored, he at once commenced to speak.

‘Shopmates and Fellow Working-men all,’ he commenced, ‘you know, of course, that we Hopewell men are on the strike, and you know in a general way why; but we have thought it right, both to ourselves, and to those whose help and co-operation we may have to ask, and whose battle, as well as our own, we believe and hope we are fighting, to explain our reasons for striking, in a more than general way,—though, as far as that goes, the general and special, the whole and sole cause of the strike is one and the same—Gaffer Grainger.’

The mention of Grainger’s name produced an instant storm of groans and hisses, mingled with cries of ‘yes, d—n him,’ and other like expressions.

‘If he would have met us in anything like a fair spirit,’ the speaker resumed, when his audience had calmed down, ‘there would

have been no strike. It was altogether against our wish. While we did our best to be prepared for it, if it was forced upon us, we did all that we honestly could, more perhaps than we ought to have done, to avoid it.' After giving details, the substance of which the reader will have gathered from what has gone before, he continued:—'That is a plain statement of facts, and I leave it to any man to say whether it does not prove what I have said—that Gaffer Grainger alone is responsible for this strike. He has been a constant cause of strikes since ever he has been a master, and I do not hesitate to say here, as I would not hesitate to say to his face, that he has been a curse to this district—a curse to it where he might have been a blessing. He has been the means of bringing it down from being—for the working-man—one of the most prosperous and contented, to being one of the poorest and most degraded in England.

He has reduced wages far below the general standard, has refused to go with the times in shortening the hours of labour, has made a practice of driving away Union-men in order to deprive them of that organized unity which alone can give them the strength necessary for self-protection, and has made the truck system a leading feature of his management. He denies the last charge, because he knows the system is illegal, but he can't say that the stores in connection with his works aren't his, and we know what's meant when workmen are told they are "expected" to deal at the store that belongs to their employer: it means that a man must take everything from the store, no matter what the prices charged, or whether the articles suit him or not; and he must take a great part of his wages, and all of any advance he may have to ask for, in kind. That's what being "expected" to deal at a master's store means, and we

know what happens to men who don't act up to such expectations.'

'They get a bit of paper,' cried a voice from the crowd, a remark which was followed by some laughter, on the subsidence of which Harrison resumed,—

'Yes, they get a bit of paper that tells them—not that they must go because they have not dealt at their master's store, *that* wouldn't do, but that their "services are no longer required." Between the extent to which Gaffer Grainger has forced this system upon his men, and the way in which he has broken their wages, he has reduced their position to pretty near that of serfs. He has risen from among ourselves, and had he ever shown the least good-feeling towards us, we could have been proud of the ability he has displayed in raising himself. But he has never shown one touch of sympathy with us, has never in his life given a shilling to a mechanics' institution,

or workmen's schools, or anything of that kind—no, not even to the hospital, which has taken in scores of men injured in his works; some of them injured too through his niggardliness in not providing proper safe-guards. In short, he has shown that he holds workmen as of less account than so much live stock or machinery, and we can only regard him as a tyrant and enemy.'

A loud burst of 'hear hears' again interrupted the speech for a minute, and then Burn-my-heart-out went on:—

'Yes, we can only look upon him as an enemy; an enemy, too, that the time has come to make a determined stand against, a stand such as we have fully made up our minds to make. We hope to carry our point with comparative rapidity and ease, but if it is needed we will fight it out to the bitterest end to which men can fairly be expected to endure.'

Here he was brought to a stop by a commotion and noise that suddenly arose

among the rearmost portion of the assembly. All eyes were swiftly turned in that direction to learn the cause of this, and it was little wonder that as the cause became visible an expression of astonishment gathered upon every face ; for there, with head erect and carelessly defiant look, Gaffer Grainger himself came stalking across the ground, direct towards the mound.

CHAPTER VI.

NO QUARTER.

AS the surprise intensified it grew silent. For about a minute's space there was an almost utter stillness, and then, as if all were moved by some common impulse—

‘An angry cry and a hiss arose
From the heart of the tossing crowd,’

a cry that rapidly increased in volume and passion, until, as Grainger came up to the edge of the assembly,

‘A roar like thunder swept the place,
And hands were clenched at him.’

The Bank Girls lent their voices with

special energy to this hostile demonstration, and altogether the aspect of the crowd was decidedly menacing, but Grainger, so far from showing any sign of fear, met the looks of hatred that were cast upon him with a scornfully contemptuous glance that he must have known was calculated to heighten the fury against him. Skirting the crowd, but keeping close enough to it to show that he had no fear of contact with it, he came to the mound and at once ascended it. As on reaching the top of it he stood boldly forth to the view of all, another tremendous yell arose, and there was an ominous pressure towards the mound—a movement that, coupled with the passion-pale faces and glaring eyes that looked up at him, would have given ‘pause’ to most men. But if Grainger felt any misgiving he showed no outward sign of it. With the same scornful look and defiant, self-assured carriage he turned his back on the crowd, and was seen speaking

to the strike leaders. His air and gestures showed that he was addressing them in the same contemptuous spirit with which he had regarded the workmen below, and this, and his turning his back upon them, wrought the crowd into a state of frenzy. The pressure towards the mound became a rush—a most decided ‘ugly rush’—and mischief to Grainger would undoubtedly have ensued, but for the energetic action of Burn-my-heart-out and his companions on the mound, who succeeded in waving back the crowd before any actual violence had been committed. When at length, partly from lack of breath for any further yelling and groaning, and partly from curiosity to learn what had brought Gaffer Grainger thus strangely amongst them, something like silence was once more restored, Burn-my-heart-out came forward and spoke again.

‘Look here, men,’ he said, ‘we working people often enough ask for fair play

when we are engaged in an affair of this sort; let us give it. Mr Grainger tells us he has something to say to you; hear him. We have had our say, let him have his. We have accused him of being the cause of this strike, of practising the truck system, and of having by his general course of action materially injured the working classes of this district, let him refute those charges—if he can. Or let him,’ he concluded, and here a slight smile flitted across his face, ‘let him propose any amends which he may think fit to offer.’

A cheer was given to Burn-my-heart-out as he fell back; and that over, the previous comparative silence was maintained, and an opening thus given him, Grainger spoke.

‘He needn’t have been at such pains to let me know that I’m accused of causing this strike, and all the rest of it,’ he began, making a sideward motion of his head towards Burn-my-heart-out as

he spoke; 'I could have told him that. When any of my men strike they always do accuse me in that way, and upon the whole I rather think it agrees with me; at any rate, I don't think I either look or feel any the worse for it. However, I haven't come here to talk about any nonsense of that kind. What I have come to say isn't much, but it's all to the point; and if you are wise you'll listen to it, and think twice of it before you let these fellows play you off to suit their hand,' and again he nodded towards the strike leaders. 'In the first place,' he went on, 'let me say, as I have said many times before, I shall manage all my works just as I like, while, at the same time, I don't wish any man to work in them unless *he* likes. If it was only that you Hopewell men didn't choose to take my terms, I wouldn't have a word to say against it: you were as much at liberty to refuse them as I was to offer them. But you are not content with

that. You want to force me to give other terms; and that's a sort of thing I do more than *say* against. I know that you've been doing all you know to put the screw upon me; but I've come to let you see that I *have* put the screw on you. You may try to make war on me, if you like; but I'll take particular care you don't carry it on in my camp.'

He paused for a moment, as if wishing to see whether his listeners had caught any special meaning in what he had last said, but they made no sign; and pointing to them with a gesture that was, perhaps unconsciously, threatening, and speaking with an emphasis in which there was also a tone of threat, he resumed,—

'Now, listen! I have not only got the lease of the Hopewell Works, but I have got the lease of the cottages as well!'

Again he paused, and again there was silence, but this time it was the silence of consternation. For a moment the men

seemed paralyzed by his announcement; and he stood enjoying their discomfiture with undisguised looks of triumph: but presently, as he was about to speak again, they began to recover from their amazement, and his voice was speedily drowned by their fierce yells and groans, and cries of, 'It's a lie!' 'It's a d—d lie!' 'The Ladies wouldn't do it!'


With the same look of triumphant satisfaction still on his face, he coolly waited, showing by his air that he was determined to have his say out, and when the workmen on the mound had succeeded in once more restoring order among their fellows, he went on,—

'No, it's not a lie. It's true—too true, I fancy some of you will have reason to think, if you don't mind what you are about! I've got the cottages; and while you've been here talking of the great things you were going to do against me, my agents have served a week's notice to

quit at every one of them ; and those who haven't signed the shop-rules by twelve o'clock this day week had better be out of the houses, for if they are not they will be turned out. Now I have said my say, and I came to say it myself in order that there might be no mistake about it—no smoothing it down or mincing it. Strike if you like, my fine fellows ; but quite understand I'll make you strike your tents if you do !'

As he finished speaking he came down from the mound, at the foot of which the crowd gathered round him in a very ominous manner. Angry shouts and hisses again arose, and clenched fists were fiercely shaken at him as he passed along ; but a number of the Hopewell men formed a sort of body-guard around him, and got him off the ground without any actual violence occurring, though several attempts—some of them by bank-girls—were made to lay hands upon him.

It was not without good reason that Mr Grainger had regarded his 'card' as an especially strong one. Played out in the sudden and decisive manner in which it had been, it was a heavy blow and sore disappointment to the Hopewell men. Even in a large manufacturing town, where other houses were to be had, it would have been a serious misfortune for so large a number of working men to have been suddenly turned out of their homes in the immediate neighbourhood of their work, but in a mining village district it seemed an absolute calamity. In arranging the strike the men had, among other secondary matters, taken into consideration the character of their landladies, saying that if, as was likely enough to be the case, the strike proved a long one, 'The Ladies' would not mind letting them go behind with their rent a bit, a most important point with working men when from any cause they are not earning a regular income. They




may retrench in the matter of food or fire or clothing, but rent is always running on. Now, however, instead of being able to calculate upon the forbearance of 'The Ladies,' they were told that the houses had passed into Gaffer Grainger's hands, and that they must either be turned out of them, or submit to his terms as an employer. And what were they to do? The nearest large town was thirteen miles away; and if they were forced to that distance and scattered about, the strike would be virtually at an end, and they simply so many men out of work.

On the other hand, surrounding villages had only houses enough for the workmen employed in them. Most of them, moreover, were those in which Grainger's Works were situated; and though in other cases the houses were not—so far as was known—directly under his control, it was taken for granted that he would at once discharge any of his hands who were known

to give shelter to their evicted brethren.

When the first excitement, caused by the discovery that their antagonist held such a crushing card, had subsided, the men looked at each other with dismayed faces, and some of them at once expressed an opinion that there was nothing for them but to 'knuckle down.' But the leaders were made of sterner stuff, and determined that, black as things looked, they would not yet throw up their hand, would not without further effort acknowledge that Grainger's card, strong as it undoubtedly was and unexpectedly as it had been played, was *necessarily* a winning one. The same night they took further counsel together, and while fully admitting the gravity of the situation, were, after an hour or two of discussion and suggestion, enabled to take a more hopeful view of the possibility of their meeting it successfully than they had done in the morning. The Ladies, they felt sure, they said, had never dreamt of



Grainger's purpose when they parted with the houses, and would—to judge by their former uniform kindness—be disposed to help them when they learned that purpose. Then their late master's son, they felt equally sure, would not like to see his father's old hands served in that way, and might on that ground afford them some material aid. While as to the men at Grainger's other Works, had they not arranged to allow themselves to be called out if the exigencies of the strike demanded it; and as it was essential to the very life of the strike that the Hopewell men should be able to keep in the neighbourhood of their base of operation, the others would be no more than carrying out their engagements in running the risk of discharge for sheltering them.

Sub-committees to attend to these various points were told off, and upon going on their missions on the following day, met with a degree of success beyond their warm-

est expectations. The Ladies and their nephew had alike been 'bested' by Grainger. He had been very urgent about having the houses, saying that in the particular case of the Hopewell works, he regarded them as being really part of the establishment, and deftly leaving it to be inferred that it was in order to bring himself into closer relationship with the men, and for their benefit rather than his own, that he wanted them. Now that they saw by his action what had been his true motive for securing the lease of the cottages, and that he had been making tools of them in the matter, they were naturally indignant. This feeling, perhaps, as well as the belief that the workmen were generally justified in their proceedings, led to their expressing sympathy with them, and offering to assist them in any way they could, if they were turned out of their homes.

The men had not come without a plan to propose in case they met with a favour-

able reception ; and smiling at the implied notion that Grainger might not carry out his threat, they informed their friends that they could assist them very greatly. The gentleman was Captain of a volunteer corps, composed for the most part of artisans from the Hopewell and neighbouring works, and in that capacity had erected on some land of his own a large drill-shed and armoury. This building, they suggested, he might place at their disposal to be fitted up by themselves to serve as an eating and meeting place in the daytime, and dormitories by night for as many men as it could be made to accommodate. While The Ladies, they further suggested, might lend the schools to be converted into a dwelling-place for women and children. This, they said, they believed would, with the assistance they expected to get from other workmen, enable them to house themselves and families, while the landlord of their club-

house—who was a timber dealer as well as a publican—had volunteered to lend them planking enough to erect sufficient shedding to warehouse their furniture in his yard. After a little consideration, both The Ladies and their nephew agreed to help the men in the manner they desired; and indeed The Ladies went further. They lived in ‘a family mansion,’ a mansion too large to be fully occupied by two unmarried women, and they offered, should the necessities of the occasion require it, to give up some spare rooms for the use of a number of the school-girls, with two or three of the mothers to attend upon them.

The other workmen, when appealed to, stood fearlessly true to their promises of support. As is generally the case in such districts, many of the inhabitants of the different villages were related by blood or marriage, and the relations of the Hopewell families came forward as boldly as kindly with offers to share their homes,

and to these were added others whose only relationship was that of friendship, while the general body of the men expressed a firm determination to the effect that if a man in any shop was discharged for taking Hopewell people into his home, all others employed there would immediately walk out.


All this was settled on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday morning as many men as could be put to it without getting into each other's way were set to the work of practical preparation; but while they made every preparation for leaving their homes, they resolved to stay in them to the last, and throw upon Grainger the odium of ejecting them.

Information of what the men were doing soon reached Grainger, and drove him almost beside himself with sullen rage. Associated with his overweening self-will was a morbid self-tormenting vanity, which, as well as the self-will, was

now stung to the quick. The stroke which he had regarded as certain to be a victorious one had not only failed to conquer the men, but had been turned by them to their own advantage. The Parson and Barber, his vanity whispered him, would 'laugh in their sleeves' at seeing his own boasted-of device turned against him, while those two old women and that fellow—so he thought of The Ladies and their nephew—and others of their kidney, would also rejoice; would profess to regard the men as martyrs, and him as a persecuting tyrant; and kill two birds with one stone in airing their own pretended generosity and spiting him by helping the men to stand out against him.

'But,' he muttered, his self-will rising fiercely, 'he would show the lot of them that he was not to be beaten; that he both could and would crush the men.'

With his mind in this frame, Barber, it may be readily believed, met with but



a cool reception when, on learning the proceedings of the men, he again hinted his opinion that it would be wise for him to compromise.

‘I suppose you have heard that the enemy mean to intrench themselves in the neighbourhood if they are driven out of their forts?’ he said, with a slight laugh, when Grainger and he met in the office on the Wednesday morning.

‘I have heard that the Hopewell lot have got hold of the drill-shed and the schools, if that’s what you mean,’ was the answer, given in no very gracious tone.

‘Well, seeing that they will be able to remain upon the spot, and are evidently prepared to go to extremes, do you think it will be worth your while to persevere in the matter?’

‘Worth my while to persevere!’ echoed Grainger, with affected surprise; ‘why not?’

‘Oh, only I gathered from what you

said when you thought you had them on the hip, that your own idea was that if they were not beaten by some such *coup* as you tried, they were not likely to be beaten at all,' answered Barber, coolly.

'I would have beaten them by a *coup*, too,' retorted Grainger in the same sullen tone, 'if it hadn't been for those meddling old women,—for I consider the fellow no better than an old woman;—but both men and meddlers will find themselves mistaken if they think I'll throw up the game because I have missed the particular trick I counted upon for pulling me through. I mean to beat them, even if it's only by tiring them out.'

'Well, from all I can hear,' said Barber, 'tiring them out would be a very long and very expensive job. They'll get plenty of backing,—they have a strong case. What they ask is less than is paid to the men in most other districts; and then the question of the stores might be

made an awkward weapon against you. Public sympathy and opinion would be all on their side.'

'Oh, d—n public opinion!' said Grainger, impatiently.

'Ah, but in this case, you see,' said Barber, smiling, public opinion would d—n you, and that is why I would advise you to compromise.'

'But I don't mean to compromise, and that's an end of the matter.'

'The beginning of *some* end, perhaps,' said Barber, shrugging his shoulders. 'However, it lies with yourself. Still, I don't think your determination is a wise one, and I wish you to remember that I have advised you against it.'

'All right; you shall have every credit for your wisdom,' replied Grainger, and then the subject dropped.

Though by Saturday afternoon the men had completed their arrangements for sheltering their families and themselves,

they remained firm to their purpose of forcing Grainger to turn them out of their houses, while the latter, as might be guessed from his tone with Barber, held us firmly to his of turning them out, and early on the Monday morning it became known that he had a strong body of bailiffs in waiting in the offices of the Hopowell Works, together with a contingent of the county police to enforce order, should there be any appearance of an inclination to riotous proceedings.

While, however, the workmen generally had remained in their houses merely with a view to compelling their antagonist to make a move which they knew must damage him, one of their number could not have left his house even if he had been desirous of doing so, and the necessity that bound him to it was still in force on the morning upon which the notice to quit would expire.

Turn-my-heart-out's wife still lay

hovering between life and death. She had shown some faint signs of rallying, but the doctor could not pronounce her out of danger, and it did not require his assurance to know that she was much too ill to bear removal or any strong excitement without the utmost danger of fatal results. The doctor had pooh-pooh'd the idea that Grainger would think about carrying out the eviction when he came to be told how ill the woman was, but so did not Burn-my-heart-out himself. His best hope had been that Grainger would abandon the eviction idea generally on finding that it would not drive the men out of the district, and when the news of the arrival of the bailiffs dispelled this hope, he fell into a mood that was at once fierce and despairing. With a savage oath he swore to himself that his wife should not be disturbed, and then with a sense of despair he thought 'but how was he to prevent it?'

No better plan than that of appealing directly to Grainger himself occurring to him, he at last resolved to act upon that.

Gruinger and Barber were together in an inner office when an office-boy brought word to the former that Jim Harrison was below, and wished to know whether he could speak to him.

'Oh yes; send him up,' he answered, at the same time casting a triumphant glance at Barber, for he instantly jumped to the conclusion that Harrison had come to make submission upon the part of the men.

Barber caught the look, but before he could make any answer to it Burn-my-heart-out entered, and his attention was turned upon him. From what he had heard of him he was predisposed to regard him with especial curiosity, and apart from that, he saw at a glance that he was worthy of a more than casual notice from one who, like himself, believed that the proper, or at

any rate, the most interesting study of mankind, is man.

The anxiety and watching consequent upon his wife's illness had told heavily upon him, even in so short a time. He was very pale, and had lost flesh until his great frame showed quite gaunt and bony, and his face, by reason of its thinness, looked drawn and sunken as well as careworn. He was evidently nervous, too, seeming unable to fix his eyes steadily on any object, and restlessly fidgeting with the hairy cap that he pulled off on coming into the office. But under all this Barber could detect indications of the combination of quick passionate temper, and dogged determination he had expected to find in such a man as The Parson had described. In a tightness about the mouth, too, and a certain glitter in his eyes, and even his obvious nervousness, he thought he could read that he was there with his mind made up to the fullest extent of its powers of

passion and determination, to carry out some resolve.

‘Oh, so here you are, then, Mr Harrison!’ was Grainger’s salute to him as soon as he was fairly in the office; ‘I thought you fellows would come to for all your fine talking.’

‘The men haven’t given in, sir, if that’s what you mean,’ said Harrison. ‘I don’t come from them,—I come on my own account. I want to ask a favour.’

‘And doesn’t it strike you you’ve come to the wrong shop?’ interrupted Grainger with a savage sneer, for he was dreadfully annoyed at having been betrayed into his premature exhibition of triumph.

‘Well, I said on my own account,’ answered Harrison, ‘but it isn’t exactly that, sir; if it was, I should know that I had no right to expect any favour. It’s this way. My wife is very ill,—it would be almost certain death to try and shift her, and I want you to let me stay in the house till she is

able to leave it. Or, if you like,' he anxiously resumed, as Grainger paused without giving an answer, 'I'll go away if you'll only let her stay, with another woman to nurse her. Can she?' he pleaded, as Grainger still remained silent.

'Oh, that's all very fine; but even if it's true, it has nothing to do with me,' said Grainger with a tone and manner that to Barber, at any rate, indicated that he was trying to work himself into a sullen rage, under cover of which harshness might be made to appear the result of passion rather than of deliberate intention.

'Not directly, perhaps, sir,' said Harrison, in reply to the last part of Grainger's observation.


'Nor indirectly either,' sharply put in the other.

'Well, no, sir, only that no man would like to have it said of him that he had made war on a woman, and a sick woman, too.'

He spoke unaffectedly, and with no idea of uttering a personal reproach; but Barber saw that Grainger was stung, and looking up from the papers with which he was making a show of busying himself, he tried to give Harrison a warning glance. But the eyes of the latter were fixed on Grainger; and speaking by the light of his own blunt nature, he went on further damaging any little chance of success in his mission that he might at first have had.

‘You can’t have any ill-will at her, sir,’ he went on, seeing that Grainger made no answer, ‘and I don’t see that you should have against me. A man should never bear malice because he got the worst of a fair fight.’

This time he had no need of the glance that Barber shot at him to tell him that he had blundered,—the instant rush of angry blood to Grainger’s face and the savage glitter that came into his eyes told him but too surely that such was the



case. He would have apologized, and had stammered out, 'I meant no offence, sir,' when the other cut him short.

'We've had quite enough of this,' he said in a low grating tone; 'I know you gang; you would like to leave the thin end of the wedge in, but you won't get the chance; you can go.'

For the first time Burn-my-heart-out showed symptoms of rising passion. When he spoke again there was a noticeable change in his tone and air, a change that might have been a warning one to Grainger had he not himself been swayed by passion.

'It's poor shuffling, that, Gaffer,' he said with a look of undisguised contempt; and then, his face softening and eyes dimming, added, 'Leaving my poor lass in the house a few days longer couldn't make any difference in the strike, either one way or the other,—you know that well enough.'

'Leave my office, I tell you!' shouted the other.

'Not yet I won't,' answered Harrison with an emphatic shake of the head. 'You said just now that you knew us gang, as you choose to call us, and now let me tell you that I know you. You would do what you know to be a coward's deed while trying to persuade me and Mr Barber that you believed you were only fighting against a trick. Even if you didn't believe what I say—though you know it's true—you could ask the doctor or even The Parson. He knows.'

'I shall ask no one anything at all about it,' answered Grainger; 'I've told you once already that, true or not true, it is nothing to do with me. If people will run their heads against a wall they must take the consequences. It's your affair, not mine. You had a week's notice, and you knew the only terms on which you could stay in the house. You may as well

take yourself off quietly. You've had your answer, and neither cringing nor blustering will serve you.'

Again a change had come over Harrison's mood. Grief seemed to have extinguished the rising passion. He looked abstracted and sorely perplexed, as if debating some hard matter with himself. He appeared to be scarcely conscious that Grainger was speaking, and after he had finished still stood like a man bewildered, making no answer.

He remained thus for a minute or two, and then his manner grew a little more collected. After a bitter struggle between inclination and necessity, he had evidently come to some resolve, and heaving a heavy sigh, and with a tone and look unmistakably telling of a consciousness of shame and humiliation, he said—

'It's hard lines for a man like me to have to seem to desert his mates, and be looked down upon by them ; but my wife

is dearer than all the world beside to me ;
I'll give in, sir ; I'll—I'll sign your rules.'

'Oh no, you won't,' broke in the other with a coarse laugh ; 'I'm not to be had in that way. You'd sign and carry your point, while the others held out and tried to carry theirs. It won't do.'

'Honour bright, sir, I'd have nothing to do with the strike after I had signed,' said Harrison, earnestly.

'Well, I don't see that any man could offer more,' said Barber, speaking for the first time ; 'and after all, as he says, a sick woman remaining in one of the houses is not calculated to affect the strike much.'

'Excuse me, Mr Barber,' said Grain-ger, 'but if you'll allow me, I'll manage this affair myself.'

'Well, but what he says is right, sir,' urged Harrison, casting a grateful look to Barber as he spoke. 'What else can I offer ? I'll go right away from hereabout, if that will suit you.'

‘You can go or stop where you like, so that you go out of this office,—that is what will suit me.’

‘I’m sure I’m very sorry to bother you, sir,’ answered Harrison, humbly, ‘but please don’t be so hard with me; say she may stop.’

‘Confound you for a nuisance,’ muttered the other, impatiently; ‘but there,’ he went on aloud, ‘I’ll put an end to it.’ As he spoke he took a book out of his desk, and after hastily running his finger along its pages for a few seconds, exclaimed,—‘Ah, Harrison, thirteen.’ Then closing the book he stepped to a speaking tube, communicating with the lower offices, and called down it,—‘Send the bailiffs up here.’

His command was promptly obeyed; and addressing himself to the leader of the band, he said, ‘Listen you, sir, it has gone twelve, so you can go and begin your work, and clear out number thirteen

on the left-hand block first of all. That is my answer,' he went on, turning to Harrison, 'and now if you don't go out of the office I'll have you thrown out.'

The excitement of the interview had brought a flush into Harrison's face; but as Grainger spoke he grew deadly pale again, and especially about the mouth, around which there was a clearly marked circle of dead white, which, mottled by a dark blue skin tint, caused by habitual shaving, produced a ghastly effect. There was an involuntary twitching of his lips, which even his hard biting at them could not restrain, and he quickly clenched and unclenched his hands with what was evidently also an involuntary nervous action. He seemed to be struggling to gain command of himself, and in some measure at least succeeded, for when after a brief pause he spoke the forced calmness of his voice contrasted strangely

with the passion-wrought expression of his features.

‘Grainger,’ he said, ‘you knew me before you were the man you are now; you know there wasn’t much in a rough way that I stuck at; and though I have been a different man since my marriage, it’s only been because of my marriage. The devil in me isn’t dead yet, that I can feel now, and if you are wise you won’t rouse it further; if you do, it will tear you. If my wife was gone I wouldn’t care much for consequences to myself if there was anything to revenge on her account.’

‘Ah, well,’ said Grainger, shrugging his shoulders, ‘I won’t have any violence; it would only be playing into your hands to have you kicked out. If you won’t go I will, and then you can prate on as long as you like.’

As he finished he began to move towards the door, and in doing so came close to Harrison. The proximity gave

the crowning touch to the passion of the latter, for suddenly stepping in front of the other, and grinding out between his teeth 'Take that, you cur,' he struck him to the ground by a smashing hit full in the face.

It was a blow that would have almost literally felled an ox, all the momentary strength of passion being added to great physical power and pugilistic skill in its delivery, and it was little wonder that on receiving it Grainger lay helpless and senseless for some minutes, or that the whole face presented a dreadfully swollen, bruised, and discoloured appearance. Both Barber and the bailiffs sprung to his assistance, and Harrison might easily have walked away during the confusion, but he stood stock still grimly looking at his handiwork, speaking only once, when, on one of the men exclaiming, in his alarm, 'You've killed him!' he answered, 'I haven't,' and then after a

pause added, in an abstracted kind of way, 'at least, not yet.'

By the aid of water sprinkled upon his face and brandy forced down his throat, Grainger was at length brought round, and presently, as those around him stood back, his eye fell upon Harrison. Instantly there flashed into his face a look of malignant hatred which, combined with the distortion of feature caused by the blow, gave him a perfectly devilish expression.

'Oh, you are here yet, are you?' he exclaimed. 'Get between him and the door, you fellows, and one of you go and bring the policemen up here.'

'Oh, you needn't be afraid,' said Harrison, now speaking coolly enough; 'I'll stand by what I've done.'

'Yes, and you shall suffer for it, too, by God!' broke in the other. 'I'll be more than equal with you for both this and the old score. I'll twist your heart-strings for you! I wouldn't give you the

satisfaction of saying so, but I didn't mean to go to extremes ; now I will, though.'

'You may depend upon it the law will punish him sufficiently for the assault,' interposed Barber, as a mild way of putting it to his employer that he was going beyond the bounds of manliness.

'I told you before, Mr Barber,' answered Grainger angrily, 'that I would manage this affair myself, and I will manage it just how I like, no matter what anybody may say or think.'

At this moment the constables were brought into the room, and turning to them, he went on, 'Take hold of that ruffian there! I give him in charge for attacking me like this in my own office.'

As he spoke he pointed to his face, which bore ample testimony to the nature and violence of the attack. Two of the officers at once advanced and laid their hands on Harrison's shoulders, while an inspector, who was in charge of the de-

tachment, observed in a tone of kindly regret, 'It's bad work this, Jim. We *did* think you were an altogether changed man.'

'So I was,' he answered; 'but I'm like to be changed again to-day—not to what I was before, for I was a man then, however rough an one—but to a devil!'

'You fellows,' said Grainger, indicating the bailiffs by a wave of his hand, 'go and set about your work at once. Begin with the house I told you, and if any one tries to interfere with you, refer them to me.'

'Stop!' exclaimed Harrison, as in obedience to this command the men were moving towards the door, and there was a something in his tone that instantly brought them to a standstill, despite Grainger's looks of angry surprise.

When the slight shuffling of feet had subsided Harrison, looking fixedly at Grainger, went on, 'Look here, Gaffer Grainger, be warned *for your own sake*.'

‘Remember, you are in custody now, Jim,’ interrupted the inspector, in the same kindly tone in which he had before spoken, ‘anything you say may be used against you.’

‘I know, sir, thank you,’ answered Harrison, ‘and I know, too, what I’m going to say will tell against me, still I must say it;—it’s the last chance of preventing worse things.’

He had turned to the inspector while addressing him, and now facing round on Grainger again, he resumed—

‘Be warned, if you’re wise, or value your carcass! I’ve told you already that if my wife is turned out of house in her state it will be almost certain death to her, and I tell you now that if you *do* have her turned out, and she *does* die through it, it will be as certain death to *you*. I’ll hold you responsible for her death, and I’ll have life for life;—I will, by the living God!’

He spoke in a tone that was only pas-


sionate by reason of its intense earnestness—an earnestness rising into a terrible solemnity, that more even than the words of his oath made some, at any rate, of his hearers shudder. He paused, as if hoping or expecting that the orders to the bailiffs would be recalled, but Grainger made no sign. Seeing this, Harrison spoke again, and, if possible, with increased impressiveness of tone and manner.

‘Make no mistake,’ he said; ‘this is no mere talk. I mean every word I say. It shall be your life for hers if it’s mine for yours as well. If you carry out your purpose I’ll carry out mine, if I swing for it. You are a rich man, and a clever one, and you are forewarned now; but for all that, and do what you may, you shan’t escape me. If my wife dies by your act, I’ll have my revenge. I’ll murder you with this hand, as sure as ever I hit you with it; if I don’t may I be struck a corpse where I stand!’

His attitude and action as he spoke—his tall muscular figure drawn to its utmost height, his rugged, strongly-marked features sternly set, his head thrown slightly backward, glittering eyes cast upward, and clenched right hand raised above his head—his *pose* as he stood thus, though all unstudied and unconscious, or rather *because* unstudied and unconscious, was magnificently dramatic. Coupled with such words as his, spoken not with the meaningless bluster of passing anger, but with the bitter emphasis of deadly resolve, it produced a feeling of awe in the beholders. In all of them, at least, except one. If Grainger felt any fear at his heart he did not show it in his face.

‘You know the charge; why don’t you take him away?’ he said in a tone that implied that he altogether ignored what the other had said, and was surprised that any one else should have heeded it.

The inspector gave a quick meaning



glance at his men, and then stepping in front of Harrison, and muttering in an half-apologetical tone, 'I must do my duty; it's a rough time when men are on strike,' slipped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists, an operation to which the latter passively submitted without saying a word. The two officers who had first laid hands on him then led him away, and at the same instant Grainger again ordered the other men to go about their work.

This time they obeyed, and the last sight that Burn-my-heart-out saw, as he was taken away prisoner, was the bailiffs marching in a body towards his home.


CHAPTER VII.

COMING TO TERMS.

DURING the latter part of this stormy interview Barber had hastily scrawled the following note :

‘DEAR GRAHAM,

‘There has been a great scene here, particulars of which there is not now time to tell. The upshot of it is, that Harrison (Burn-my-heart-out) is in custody for assaulting Grainger, and the latter has given orders that Harrison’s cottage is to be the first cleared out, the critical state of his wife (of which, I dare say, you will be aware) notwithstanding. I could not pre-



vent this last thing from being done, even if I went to extremes ; but your office, and your *popularity with the men*, might enable you to do so—supposing, that is, as I do not doubt for a moment will be the case, you think it your duty to make the attempt.

‘ Yours, &c.,

‘ S. BARBER.’

Following close at the heels of the departing bailiffs, Barber passed into a lower office, and calling a boy to him, gave him this letter, saying as he did so, ‘ Run up to the cottages as fast as ever you can, and find The Parson—he is somewhere about there—and give him this.’

Meanwhile the state of affairs at the cottages was growing exciting. An immense crowd was assembled in the space in front of them, their inhabitants, women and children as well as men, having come out-of-doors, while large numbers had

come from surrounding villages, the great majority of the workmen of the neighbourhood having become Saint Mondayites for the occasion. A few of the county police hung about the outskirts of the gathering, but there had not been the slightest call for their service, and indeed at a first glance the crowd seemed an especially peaceful one. But only at first glance! The lowering brows, fierce flashing eyes, and the grating tone of the low-voiced conversation, would have been sufficient to indicate to any moderately keen observer that the quiet was an ominous one—one of the lull-before-a-storm kind, one, too, that a very slight jar might cause to burst into storm. An evil spirit had crept in among many of the men, a spirit prompting them to resist—or rather under the guise of resisting, to avenge—the sacking of their homes. But though the general body was

now for an appeal to physical force as a last recourse, the voice of the leaders was still for moral force only. And with theirs was the voice of The Parson, who had joined with them throughout the morning in impressing their doctrine upon the men, and who was standing with a little group of them when Barber's messenger reached him. Since twelve o'clock—and it was now nearly half-past—all had been in a high-strung state of expectation, and the sight of the flushed and panting office-boy giving him a letter turned general attention to The Parson, and a thousand eyes noted that he went pale as he read it.

‘Do any of you know what Harrison has been about?’ he asked, looking up when he had mastered the contents of the letter.

‘No, we’ve been wondering what’s become of him,’ said one of the group.


'Do you ask for any particular reason, sir,' questioned another, who was Harrison's particular friend.

'Yes,' answered The Parson; 'this has reference to him.'

'Well, sir, he has gone to ask Gaffer Grainger not to turn his wife out of the cottage; you know how ill she is. He hasn't told any one but me, and I wasn't to mention it; for though he went, he didn't think any good was likely to come of it.'

'I'm afraid much evil is likely to come of it,' said The Parson, and then he stated the substance of Barber's communication.

'Oh dear! Oh dear! That is a bad job in every way,' exclaimed the workman. I advised him all I could against going, for I didn't think that when it come to the push Grainger would really have turned a dying woman into the street, though there is no saying what he may do now. But Jim would have his own way: he was



that over-anxious about his wife, his head was half turned.'

'He had better have left well alone,' said The Parson; 'but that is not the thing now. We must see what can be done.'


'Look there!' suddenly exclaimed the workman, pointing excitedly to where a number of the men had got hold of the office-boy, and were eagerly questioning him. 'If he knows what has happened, and tells them, and Grainger *does* try to have Jim's wife turned out, the men won't stand by and see it. Their blood is up at it. There'll be murder done!'

'I hope not,' said The Parson; 'I hope there will be no violence. We must do all that we can to prevent it. I will go down to Harrison's house, and I think I may promise that his wife shall not be turned out; but, in any case, you and your companions must try to keep the men quiet. I know it is hard for you to

see your homes broken up like this ; but still I shall expect you to honestly do your very utmost to keep order.'

'Well, it's hard lines, as you say, sir,' answered the man ; 'but, for all that, you may trust us. We'll do our best, and believe me, for your credit's sake as well as our own, sir.'

They separated hastily as he finished speaking, for the murmuring and gesturing that arose among the men showed them that the office-boy had told them something at least of what had occurred, and that the news had stimulated afresh the evil feeling among them. The boy had indeed told all he knew, namely, that Burn-my-heart-out had come down to the office, had been admitted to see Grainger, and had subsequently been taken away handcuffed by the police. In reply to their questions as to what Harrison was charged with, and the purport of the letter brought to The Parson, the boy, however,



could tell them nothing; and in the hope of gleaning some ray of information upon the latter point, all eyes were again turned upon The Parson as he walked towards the cottages. When at length he took up his stand in front of Harrison's dwelling, they seemed to divine the cause of his doing so, and the fierce, rolling murmur instantly rose into a hoarse, threatening shout. This ominous sound had scarcely died away when the bailiffs, followed by the body of police, came upon the ground. Led by one of their number, who acted as chief, those charged with the work of eviction marched straight to where The Parson stood, and seeing that he did not move, the chief in a perfectly respectful manner said :—

‘ You must allow us to pass, sir, please.’

‘ You know that there is a woman dangerously ill in the house?’ said The Parson questioningly.

‘ Well, yes, sir,’ the man answered; ‘ we

heard her husband say so : but then, so did Mr Grainger, and he gave us strict orders that we were to come here first. So what can we do ? We'll be as gentle and make as little noise as we can, sir ; but we must do what we are told.'

'I know that you are awkwardly placed,' said The Parson ; 'but Mr Grainger spoke in anger, and may alter his mind. You had better begin at some other part of the building. I'll hold you blameless.'

'Ay, if Mr Grainger would let you, sir,' answered the man ; 'but I don't think he would, and he is our master in this affair.'

He would have passed The Parson as he spoke, but the latter backed towards the door, and at the same time a number of workmen, who had gathered round, also placed themselves between the house and the bailiffs. It would have been palpable even to an unpractised eye that these men were determined to oppose any

attempt at force upon the part of the bailiffs, and seeing this, the police inspector went forward.

In a few words the chief of the bailiffs told him how matters stood, whereupon he observed to The Parson, 'It's a bad business, sir, but these men can't help it; they are only seeking to carry out their orders, and your interfering with them will do no good; in fact, I think it's more likely to do harm,—it may encourage the men to make a fight of it. They look as if they meant mischief now.'

'Well, as far as that goes,' said The Parson, 'I'm afraid that nothing will prevent them from fighting if this sick woman is turned out of her home: the sight will make them uncontrollable. But, independent of that, I don't think that when he becomes calm Mr Grainger would be pleased with any one who had assisted to carry out a deed that would so blacken his name. I think that he ought, at any

rate, to be spoken to again before anything is actually done—I don't mean in regard to the cottages generally, but to this particular one.'

'Well, sir, he gave his orders as if he meant them to be carried out,' said the inspector, 'still it might be worth while to ask him again; and if you like to go and speak with him, I dare say these men will wait till you have had your answer.'

As he spoke he gave an interrogative glance at the leader of the bailiffs, who at once replied 'that they would be perfectly agreeable to such an arrangement.'

'I'm much obliged to you both,' The Parson said, 'and I'll avail myself of your kind offer; but I think I had better not go away from among the hands. Would you let one of your officers carry a note from me?'

'With pleasure,' the inspector answered, and then The Parson taking out his pocket-book wrote on a leaf of it,—



‘DEAR MR GRAINGER,


‘I have heard of the manner in which you have been assaulted by Harrison, and can quite understand your having, in the feeling of indignation caused by his conduct, ordered that his cottage should be the first dealt with under your notice of last week. I feel assured, however, that on becoming cooler, and remembering that his wife is so ill as to be altogether unfit to be removed, you would not really wish your order to be carried out, and I have, therefore, ventured to stay any action in the matter until I should have made this communication to you. Trusting you will authorize me to tell the men that in consideration of the state of his wife’s health, Harrison’s home is to be left untouched, I am,

‘Faithfully yours,

‘A. GRAHAM.’

When he had despatched this note he


briefly told the workmen around him what was being done, and earnestly besought them to be peaceful. Seeing that in face of his arrangement they were as parties under truce, they readily listened to his entreaties, and abandoning their threatening attitude, waited in comparative calm for results. This lull had lasted for about three quarters of an hour, when sounds and signs of excitement again arose on the outer verge of the crowd, and on turning the gaze in that direction the cause was amply explained, for returning with the policeman who had taken The Parson's note was Grainger himself. The first feeling to which the sight of him gave rise was one of wild anger, and he was greeted with a tremendous yell of execration, but presently curiosity and expectation grew stronger even than anger. Whatever could he be come for? Was it to offer terms to the hands; and if so, what terms? If it was not to try to effect



a general settlement of the strike, was it—as a matter of policy—to countermand his order about the cottages? or was it—and the thought of this last thing brought the blood flushing fiercely into the faces of those whose minds it crossed—to superintend, to gloat over their being turned out of their homes? These were the questions that many in the crowd asked themselves and each other; and looking to Grainger's action to give them answers, they watched his movements in silence, and called upon others to be silent also. After the first resounding yell, there was no further active hostile demonstration; but the light of hate shone plainly in the eyes that rested upon him as he passed along, and the sight of his face, all bruised and blackened, called up looks of grim satisfaction in the beholders.

Heedless alike, however, of cries and looks,—so far, at least, as outward seeming was concerned,—he strode on till he stood

face to face with The Parson, and then his suppressed fury broke forth, not for the moment in words, for he was choked by passion, but in a menacing gesture with his clenched fist, and a look that further distorting his already disfigured features gave them a perfectly diabolical expression. In this look, the workmen who had planted themselves between the bailiffs and the cottage read the relentlessness of his purpose, and the devilry that had been in their own looks when they had first taken their present stand instantly came back to them. As though the matter had been spread by some magnetic impulse, the rest of the crowd seemed also to have divined his purpose, for before he had yet spoken a word there arose another vengeful roar—a roar that caused The Parson to look round to the men in a mute appeal for peace, the police inspector to signal his men to close in, and the strike-leaders to go rushing



about hither and thither exhorting to quietness.

If Grainger understood the significance of the shout he was in too reckless a mood to be warned by it. 'You've let the mask drop, then, have you?' he said, addressing The Parson in a voice that trembled from his efforts to make it a coolly sneering one; 'you are practising riot against me as well as preaching it, eh? It's a pity you should have so lowered yourself for nothing, though, for I can assure you I'm not going to be blustered out of my purpose by you any more than by the rest of the gang.'

'Why, Mr Grainger, I tell you the woman is in a dying state; you surely cannot mean to do this thing,' said The Parson in a tone in which there was much of doubt and amazement, but nothing of personal resentment.

'And I tell you,' fiercely broke out Grainger, 'that I am not going to be done

by any of you ! I'll answer for my own actions ! I *do* mean to do this thing, and I *will*. So stand aside.'

Beckoning to the bailiffs to follow him, he would have entered the house, but The Parson, taking a step backward, firmly barred the way. 'Then you shall not!' he exclaimed, drawing himself up to his full height. 'As a Christian minister I forbid it. Your miserable self-will has driven you mad, and it is my duty to act for you, to save you from yourself, from the sin of blood-guiltiness—for it would be nothing less—upon which you would rush. Look at the faces round you, and read the lesson in them. Be wise and go, lest the storm burst, for if it does, none will be able to control it or save you.'

Once or twice Grainger would have interrupted, but his voice was choked by passion ; now, however, turning again to the bailiffs, he hoarsely exclaimed, 'Curse you for a lot of curs, why don't you do

what you are told ? sweep him out of the way,—there are plenty of you.'

After a moment's hesitation they began to make a forward movement, but instantly the band of workmen who had taken up their stand between them and the cottage also stepped forward and brought them to a standstill again. While the two parties stood eyeing each other, one of the workmen, a big muscular, determined-looking fellow, somewhat notorious as a bruiser, and known as 'Slogger' Dawson, suddenly came up to Grainger, and shaking his clenched fist in his face, exclaimed, 'Look here, Gaffer, if they try it on it will be them and us for it; not that we have any ill-will to them, poor devils! I suppose it's their way of getting a living, but because come what will, we don't mean to see poor Jim's sick wife turned out-of-doors. If he is in prison he has got mates that will stand by him. You may do as you like about the other houses, but you must leave

Jim's alone. If you think of crossing his threshold, say your prayers first. If I once did lay hands on you I don't think I should be able to stop short of finishing you, and I'm only one of hundreds of that way of thinking.'

'You bullying scoundrel,' broke in Grainger, who had again for a moment or two been rendered speechless with rage, 'I'll put you where Jim is.'

'D—n you, it shan't be for nothing, then!' exclaimed the other furiously; 'I'll squeeze the life out of you.'

He made a grasp at his throat as he spoke, but The Parson rushed between them, and thrust Dawson back, then turning to Grainger, he hurriedly exclaimed, 'For God's sake let me try to get you away; you'll be killed if you stay a moment longer.' The police inspector, who had also rushed up, spoke to the same effect. 'You must go, sir,' he said decisively; 'it's the only chance to keep peace. I can't be

answerable for anything that may happen to you if you stay.'

In sullen silence he yielded, and the inspector beckoning forward a number of his men, they formed a bodyguard around him; but even thus protected retreat had now become a difficult and dangerous matter. The howling and hooting of the crowd was something terrible. A number of determined rushes were made to get hold of him, and in one of them, which he headed, 'Slogger' Dawson broke through the guarding circle, and amid the thundering cheers of the others, had all but succeeded in dragging Grainger out, when a crashing blow on the wrist from a staff which the inspector in his emergency drew from his pocket, made him let go his hold, and enabled the police to get Grainger back in their midst again. Thanks to the earnest entreaties of The Parson, who was successful in dissuading the men from carrying out some intended rushes, and to

the bold front shown by the police in withstanding those that were made, the gauntlet of the crowd was at last safely run, and then The Parson turned back to the cottages. On reaching them he found the practical work of eviction just beginning, the workmen not only not resisting—action against Harrison's house being abandoned—but each helping to get out his own furniture; and seeing that all was now likely to go on quietly, he went to his own home, where Barber presently called upon him.

‘The great man's I-will-ism has brought you and him to loggerheads, then, I hear,’ said Barber as soon as their first greetings were over.

‘I would not care much if that was all,’ answered The Parson seriously; ‘I'm afraid it will lead to worse things.’

‘For him, I'm pretty sure it will,’ said Barber; ‘he has wantonly made himself an enemy such as I would not like to have.’

‘Harrison, I suppose you mean?’

‘Yes. In a general way I don’t believe in the vow-of-vengeance sort of thing *off* the stage, but I’m inclined to think that this case is more likely than not to prove an exception to the rule. If I were in Grainger’s place, that man’s face as I saw it last would murder sleep for me, and I’m not exactly a nervous man.’

‘But what actually took place, and how did it come about?’

In reply to this question, Barber gave him a minute account of all that had occurred at the office.

‘Ah, he shouldn’t have struck him,’ said The Parson.

‘He shouldn’t. It placed him in his power,’ assented Barber; ‘but if he struck not wisely as regards himself, I expect Grainger will be of opinion that he struck too well as regards him,—it was quite in the ox-felling style, and showed that Gregory had *not* forgotten the swashing blow of his fighting days. I’m sorry for

his own sake he should have done it, though,' Barber went on; 'it will tell against him before the magistrates, but the provocation should be well put before them, too. It would only make matters worse for me to appear openly in them, but get him the best legal advice you can, on my account, and if when this is over he wants work elsewhere, let me know,—I think I can manage that for him.'

'But do you think his threats meant anything more than the passion of the moment?' questioned The Parson anxiously, making no direct reply to what Barber had just said.

'They weren't blustered out in momentary passion,' answered Barber; 'they were spoken in the coolness of implacable determination. He fully knew and measured what he said, and meant it every word, and will continue to mean it. If his wife dies, and he considers that her death is in any way attributable to Grain-

ger's act, I've no doubt whatever in my own mind that he'll try to carry out his threats. However, as you have succeeded in stopping Grainger from turning the wife out of the house, I dare say the affair will pass off without any more tragic consequences than the bruising of our great man's face—but tell me how things went on after you got my note.'

The Parson in his turn told his story, and had scarcely concluded it when his housekeeper brought him word that a woman from the Hopewell cottages wished to speak to him. The messenger had followed close at the heels of the housekeeper, and seeing and recognizing her, The Parson called out, 'What is it, Mrs Roberts?'

'Oh, sir, if you please,' gasped the woman, for she was panting from excitement and haste, 'come at once. Jim Harrison's wife is dying, and she wants to see you.'

She would have spoken further, but

The Parson waited to hear no more. Striding into the hall, he took up his hat, and hastily set out for the cottages again. On reaching them and being taken into the bed-room in which Jim Harrison's wife was lying, he saw that she was indeed dying, was very near to her death. The death damp was on her brow, the death pallor gathering in her face, the death rattle beginning to mingle with the faint power of speech still left to her. In the morning she had only been weak, and in the opinion of those attending her in a fair way to recovery—with rest and quiet. But those two things needful she unhappily could not have. Her mind was ill at ease, and would not let her body rest. The strike weighed heavily upon her. She knew how anxious her husband had been lest she should have to be removed, and he had confided to her his intention of seeing Grainger. Knowing the character of the latter, and the strength

of her husband's love, she had feared lest ill rather than good should come of such a meeting; and as minutes grew into hours without her husband returning, her fears as to what might be the cause of his absence wrought her into a highly feverish state.

Then had come the shouting and surging of the crowd outside, heightening the feverishness, causing convulsive starts, and at times slight delirium. Finally, after The Parson had quitted the ground, her husband's sister, who was nursing her, and who had by that time also become anxious at her brother's lengthened absence, left the sick-bed for a few minutes to make inquiries, and was told all that had happened. In the impulse of a passionate nature she had rushed back to the sick-room, and repeated the ill news, with the immediate effect of throwing her patient into strong convulsions, from which she only recovered to sink into the state

of collapse which heralded the approach of death.

When The Parson entered this sister-in-law, a tall, handsome, but somewhat masculine-looking matron, was bending tenderly over the dying woman, whose eyes were fixed intently on her face, which presented a strange appearance, for while wet with trickling tears, it was set in a hard, unpitying, unyielding expression. The gaze of the dying eyes was one of earnest entreaty, and presently there came a low, struggling whisper :—

‘Promise me, Jane! Do! Do!’

‘I canna, lass! I canna!’ the other sobbed out, straightening herself and sweeping her hair back from her forehead. ‘I’m not good like you; it’s not in my nature. I couldna keep that promise if I made it. Don’t make me sin my soul, Esther! Don’t look at me like that, lass!’ she went on, turning her head away from the eyes which still remained intently

fixed upon her. She had just glanced at The Parson when he entered, and then in her earnestness had forgotten him, but in turning her eye fell upon him again, and in a tone of relief she exclaimed, 'See here, lass, here's The Parson, come, he'll do you more good than me.'

The Parson, who had been standing still just inside the doorway, came forward as she spoke, and knelt by the bedside. There was silence for about a minute's space, and then the dying woman whispered:—

'Pray, O—our—'

He caught her meaning, and in a clear, soft tone commenced the Lord's Prayer. She closed her eyes, and with a calmer, more peaceful expression upon her face, lay still until he had said:—'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,' when, with a faint motion of the hand, she stopped him, and opening her now fast-glazing eyes, turned


them upon her sister-in-law with such evident special purpose that The Parson felt it to be his duty to pause even in such a solemn moment, and ask her upon whom it was cast if she knew the meaning of the look.

‘She wants me to promise,’ the woman answered, ‘to ask Jim to forgive Grainger.’

He saw by her face that to attempt to reason with her now would be mere waste of time, and time was precious, for Burn-my-heart-out’s wife was sinking fast. Putting his lips close to her ear he said, in a slow, distinct tone, ‘I’ll tell Jim.’

She tried to speak, but the words died away ere reaching her lips, but The Parson could tell that she had understood, and was comforted. She lay still for some minutes, and then there came another, and a last flickering up of the flame of life.

‘You’ll be his friend,’ she feebly whispered, without opening her eyes, which



she had closed again after The Parson had spoken.

‘To the utmost of my power!’ The Parson answered in a fervent tone.

A shadowy smile crept over her face as she received his assurance, and then she began to lose consciousness. ‘Don’t cry, lad,’ she muttered. ‘You *will* see me again—it won’t be for always. Yes, it is cold; cover my feet. Beside the children, Jim; I shall rest best there. Good! thou’st never been aught but good to me; God bless thee, lad! My ring and a bit of my hair. Dark—dark! Lay me down. Tired—tired—good-night—good—Jim!’

So she sunk into a quiet sleep, which, half an hour later, had become the dreamless sleep of death. The sister-in-law was the first to perceive the change, and falling on her knees, and kissing the dead lips, she sobbed out, ‘Good-bye, little Esther; good-bye, Jim’s darling. You are in a better place now!’

'I hope,' said The Parson softly, 'that when you have time to become calm you will respect her last wish.'

'If I could do that, sir,' she answered somewhat haughtily, 'I would have promised her: it gave me the sorest heart I ever had to deny her. I'll persuade Jim *to* be revenged. Though, as far as that goes, he'll need no persuading to it, and the only one that could have persuaded him against it lies there dead.'

'But you should remember,' said The Parson, 'that his wife might have died had there never been any misunderstanding with Mr Grainger.'

'And she might not,' answered the woman hotly. 'She might have been alive and well at this minute, and most likely would, if it hadn't been for him. If Jim had come home with word that she was to stay in the cottage, and that he could be with her, she would have come round. It's only owing to Grainger that

she didn't have that chance, and her death lies at his door, and I'll take good care that Jim knows that it does, whatever you or any one else may tell him.'

The Parson saw that further argument in the woman's present mood would be worse than useless, and by way of closing the subject, he said, 'Well, we will say no more about it just now, but I shall still hope that you will think better of it later. You will be wanted here,' he resumed, after a brief pause; 'shall I go and break the news to Jim?'

She thankfully assented, and with a few words of sympathy he left her. Going straight to the nearest railway station, he took train to the little town, some eight miles distant, to which Harrison had been taken. Arrived there, his first care was to engage a solicitor to watch the charge before the magistrates on the next morning, and then he went on to the police office, where he found Harrison in one of

the cells. He told him of his wife's death as gently as he could, and in doing so carefully laid weight upon the fact that she had not been turned out of the cottage; but neither on this point nor any other did Harrison make any reply. He seemed stunned by grief. He covered his face with his hands, and moaned aloud while The Parson was speaking, and when he had finished only looked up for a minute, and groaned out, 'I'm crushed, Parson, crushed; I canna speak, I canna think—I wish I couldn't feel!'

'I know it's a heavy, heavy loss to you, Jim,' said The Parson feelingly.

'Oh Parson, Parson,' he groaned, covering his face again and his whole frame trembling. 'But there,' he added when he had recovered, 'I shall perhaps be more my own man to-morrow.'

Taking this as the expression of a wish to be left alone, The Parson, after speak-

ing a few words of comfort, shook hands with him, and took his departure.

The next morning Harrison was taken before the magistrates. Hopewell and other workmen crowded the little court, and hundreds of them were gathered outside, all painfully anxious to know how things would go with their unhappy mate. A riot or attempt at rescue was feared by the authorities, who by way of precaution got their prisoner into the court by a private entrance. Grainger, too, by their advice smuggled himself into the court, and it was as a matter of safety as well as of courtesy that he was allowed a seat on the bench. Of the three magistrates, one was an iron-master, and one a mine-owner, and this in the opinion of the workmen augured badly for Harrison. That he would be committed for trial was regarded by most of them as a foregone conclusion, and in this view they were

strengthened when Grainger, in giving his evidence, made it tell as heavily as possible against the prisoner. Their surprise, therefore, was as great as their feelings of satisfaction and triumph when, in a few minutes after 'Gaffer' had concluded his evidence, the trial was over and Harrison at liberty. Briefly the lawyer told the story of his trouble, of his motive in seeking the interview with Grainger, and of the death of his wife since he had been in custody. The Parson confirmed the truth of the story, and spoke to Harrison's character for years past; and then after scarcely a minute's consultation the magistrates settled the case by the infliction of a nominal fine. Instantly the good news was taken to the crowd without; and when some minutes afterwards Harrison came out, friends flocked round him, and warmly grasping his hands, greeted him with words of pity and sympathy. Once or twice he tried to speak, but his voice

failed him ; and seeing that to leave him alone would be the truest kindness, they fell back.

Accompanied by The Parson, Harrison returned to his home by the first available train. No one objected to his entering his cottage now, and during the rest of the day he locked himself in the room in which his dead wife lay. His sister, who was married to a forgerman in a neighbouring village, begged of him to come out and go home with her, but he persistently refused until about night-fall, when he at last consented, under the urgent entreaty of her and The Parson, who had come round to inquire about him. On the following morning The Parson called at the sister's ; and knowing how sorely the man had been tried, he was not much surprised to find that Harrison was laid on a sick-bed—that brain fever had set in.

On the Thursday Harrison's wife was buried, and the occasion was made use of

by the work-people to exhibit another expression of feeling. The actual funeral party, was a small one consisting of some half-dozen relatives; but the road to the church was thickly lined, not only by the Hopewell men and women, but by hundreds from other villages, and the little churchyard was filled to overflowing. All who had them wore black clothes, while most of those who had not showed mourning badges of crape, the men upon their arms, the women in their bonnets. Men uncovered and women lowered the head as the hearse passed, and on all sides words of sorrow and sympathy for 'poor Jim' were mingled with curses and ill wishes against Grainger.

If the turn events had taken in connection with the strike had any effect upon Grainger, it was to harden him in his resolve to use any and every means in his power to conquer the men. The men upon their part were as resolved; and so

the war went on in the utmost bitterness of spirit on both sides—and in each successive phase of it the result continued to be against the hitherto invincible master. The strike became a ‘topic of the day,’ and was discussed in all the great papers, and in every instance in a tone adverse to Grainger. Local papers in the interests of masters abandoned him, and those in the interests of the men, in very unmeasured and very personal language, held him up as a monster of such hideous mien, as to be generally hated needed but to be generally known.

When in the week following the Hopewell evictions he discharged two men at another Works for sheltering Hopewell families, the mates of the men boldly carried out their provisional arrangement with the Union, every man on the ground instantly laying down his tools, and the whole marching out of the gates in a body at the same time as the discharged hands.

The same retaliatory and defiant proceeding was as promptly carried out by the men concerned, when in his dogged determination he on the next day discharged a dozen of the hands in the Works furthest from the Hopewell ones, for subscribing to the strike fund; and then for the first time he began to falter in his course, and admit to himself that the men were likely to prove too strong for him. He had contracts on hand which it would be ruinous to him not to deliver at the stipulated time, and though he could have felt easy about the stopping of any one of his Works, he was not in a position to risk—against such antagonists as the Hopewell men had proved themselves—resort to the last coercive move of a general lock-out, or to stand against a general draw-out upon the part of the men, of which last measure he began to entertain fears, which speedily proved to be well-founded. After a week or two of inaction upon his part, the Union



leaders made a pretty shrewd guess at his position, and acting with boldness and decision, they at once called out the men from all his Works. He tried to get men from other districts, but in that too the efforts of the Union men defeated him, and then at length, yielding to Barber's advice, he gave in, under the guise of consenting to arbitration.

The result of the arbitration was that the terms which the Hopewell men had offered to take before striking were granted to all the Works ; the truck system was got rid of by a side stroke in the shape of a rule that all wages, whether fully due or granted in advance, were to be paid in cash only ; and it was arranged that on the one hand Burn-my-heart-out, 'Slogger' Dawson, and some half-dozen others who were named, should not be taken into Grainger's employ again, while, on the other, he was not to do anything to prevent them from getting work elsewhere.

And so the great Hopewell strike terminated—but not its consequences, as the great Mr Grainger was destined to have proof.

BOOK III.

FOUL PLAY.

CHAPTER I.

MR GRAINGER PROPOSES.

AFTER receiving Mrs Vernon's version of the nature and meaning of Blanche's feelings with regard to the position in which she conceived herself to be placed, Mr Grainger was at pains to make it appear that he quietly, and, so far as his feelings would allow, even cheerfully, accepted the situation. He assumed an air of being merely frank and friendly, taking care, however, to let it be seen that it cost him an effort to do so. He tacitly acquiesced in the little manœuvres

by which Blanche contrived that they should not be left alone with each other, and made his visits less frequent.

During the excitement of the strike it had been comparatively easy to him to carry out this subdued line of conduct, but on the settlement of the great trade dispute his mind returned more violently again to thoughts of love.

All the strongest passions of his nature were appealed to by his desire to possess Blanche. Her striking beauty, her refinement of tone and manner, and general air of high-breeding, seemed to gather added charms by contrast with the coarse surroundings of the Black Country, and had come to have an irresistible attraction for him; to form a picture on which his imagination was wont to dwell with ardent longing. But while love, pure and simple, love for herself alone, was his first and most powerful feeling, he was also

swayed by the thought that to win her would gratify his ambition.

Though now poor, she was nevertheless the same Blanche Vernon who had refused noblemen, who had proposed to her, not because they supposed her rich, but because she was—what still she was. Then, with the means she would have at command as his wife, she could—as he phrased it to himself—take the shine out of the county swells, many of whom he knew affected to despise him, even while they flattered him and bowed down to his wealth and influence. Moreover, in winning her he would be defeating and punishing a rival he hated, and further, would be putting the force of his own self-will in a triumphant light before Barber. When wrought upon by these feelings he would vehemently repeat to himself his old cry—that he *would* win her. But at other times his reason would tell him that

the chances of his being able to do so must be very doubtful.

With his mind in this state, and the time arrived when Harding's return to England might be daily expected, it was no wonder that thoughts of his love haunted him even amid business troubles. It was more of Blanche than of the matter in hand that he was thinking, when on the Monday on which the Hopewell men 'went in' he was talking over the cost (to himself) of the strike with Barber. In going into details to get at the money cost of his defeat by the workmen, he saw how complete it had been in other respects, how his every move had been successfully countered, and this suggested very gloomy reflections. The strongest minds have generally some tinge of superstition latent in them, and what there was in Grainger's now asserted itself. He had had far greater, far more justifiable grounds for believing that he could conquer the Hope-

well men than he had for hoping that he could make Blanche Vernon his wife, and yet see how things had gone against him ! 'Had Fortune,' he asked himself, 'turned against him ? Was his being beaten in the strike but the forerunner of his being beaten in the battle of love ?'

So his thoughts were running when Barber, who had been glancing over the *Times*, suddenly asked,

'Are you superstitious at all ? I mean, do you believe in omens, or runs of luck, or things of that kind ?'

Startled by a question that chimed in so exactly with what was passing in his mind at the moment, Grainger confusedly stammered, 'Believe in omens ? I don't know ; why ?'

'Only that I see that the Sea-King—the steamer Harding has been away in—arrived at Gravesend yesterday, and I was thinking that if you *were* superstitious, had notions of misfortunes never coming singly,

and so forth, the fact of fortune having gone against you in this fight with the hands might dishearten you in regard to encountering Harding's pretensions about Miss Vernon.'

'Possibly it might, if I thought I would have to encounter them; but I don't think I will. I don't say that he wasn't smitten, but at the same time his wasn't a case of love-sickness, and nothing else. His pretensions were to the rich and influentially connected, as well as the beautiful, Miss Vernon. Now she is poor Miss Vernon,—Miss Vernon under a cloud, Miss Vernon without money, and with expensive tastes and habits; and I do him the justice of believing that he will know that a poor, fine-lady wife means ruin to a struggling man.'

He spoke with an assumption of ease and assurance, but Barber detected the furtive look of anxiety with which he watched him, and knew well enough that

what he had just said was intended as a feeler to draw out his opinion. As it happened, he was rather pleased than otherwise to have an opportunity of expressing his views on the subject, and so at once replied,

‘*He* wouldn’t consider that you were giving him credit in speaking that way of him. It strikes me that he has plenty of confidence in his own ability, to carry weight in the race for wealth, and more than enough love for Miss Vernon to make him love her all the more dearly and chivalrously *because* she has come to be “poor Miss Vernon.” You may depend upon it, he will be here within the next two or three days.’

‘You may take my word for it he won’t,’ said Grainger fiercely; ‘I must have her, and I tell you again I will. You don’t know me yet.’

‘Well, if love isn’t blind, it is blinding,’ was Barber’s mental commentary; and

then with a shrug of the shoulders he turned to business again.

That same morning Blanche Vernon, who had been watching the shipping intelligence of the newspapers for days past, saw the announcement of the Sea-King's arrival as she sat at breakfast with her mother. The sight of it set her heart a-flutter, and dropping the paper, she involuntarily exclaimed, 'Oh, mamma, the Sea-King is in !'

'Oh, indeed !' said Mrs Vernon coldly and with a half-sneer ; '*that*, then, is the meaning of your scanning the paper so eagerly of late.'

'But, mamma, you will receive Lionel kindly when he comes ?' questioned Blanche in a tone of entreaty.

'Of course I shall be civil to him *if* he comes,' Mrs Vernon answered, 'but you know my opinion upon that point.'

Chilled by her mother's manner, Blanche said no more, though her thoughts

continued to dwell tumultuously on the coming appearance of her lover, for she had no doubts of his constancy. The next day she looked eagerly for a letter, but none came. For this, however, she could imagine many reasons, but when on the day following that there was no news from Harding, she felt a little hurt as well as greatly disappointed, though even then she never for a moment doubted that she would speedily both hear from and see him. But when day after day passed, and days grew into weeks, and Harding still made no sign, hope and expectation faded from her heart, and gave way to grief—grief that was embittered by her mother's 'damnable iteration' of 'I told you so.'

At the end of a month there came some word *of* Harding, but it was of a kind to gratify the mother, not console Blanche. Matters connected with the winding up of the late Mr Vernon's busi-

ness were still in course of adjustment, and the gentleman who had them in hand, communicating with Mrs Vernon concerning them, said in a postscript:—

‘By the way, in case you have not heard it from other sources, I ought to tell you that Mr Harding was here about a month ago. He had hurried down from London, and gone straight to your old place, from whence he was referred to me. Speaking from personal observation, I can say that he was very much shocked on hearing what had taken place, though his conduct subsequently seems to indicate that the shock to his feelings was scarcely of so disinterested a character as at the time I took it to be. On the impulse of the moment I gave him your present address, but afterwards thought that you, perhaps, would not approve of my having done so. As things turned out, however, it was of no consequence. He called upon me again last week, and then, to my sur-

prise, I found that he had been hanging about Stonebury all the time, and had *not* been to see you. I don't know why, as he showed a decided inclination to be fierce if questioned. He came in to tell me—so far as I could make out, for he was scarcely coherent, and I cannot see what *point* there was in his giving me such intelligence—that he was going back to London, and that letters addressed to Parker and Son, engineers, would reach him for the next six weeks, after which time he would be going to sea again.'

Mrs Vernon read this with jubilant feelings, and when she had finished handed it to her daughter, saying, 'There, Blanche, you will see by that how fully right I was in my views about Mr Harding.'

She saw the pained expression that came over Blanche's face as she read, saw that she turned deadly pale, that her eyes grew dim, and her hand trembled as she held the letter. The sight moved her, and

suppressing an inclination to indulge in an I-told-you-so song of triumph, she kindly said, 'I can understand how disappointed *you* feel, and for your sake I could wish that he had withdrawn in more manly fashion. Don't grieve, dear. You can't see it now, but you may rely upon it that it is better for you that things have fallen out as they have.'

Blanche could not see it, and she did grieve sadly, for she had loved dearly, and with her absence had made the heart grow fonder. She felt both his desertion and the manner of it. 'She would not have thought that of Lionel,' she would say to herself when brooding over the matter; and presently, with a passionate impatience, she would add that she could not believe it even now. There must be some mistake or misunderstanding. This thought wrought painfully upon her mind. She had heard and read of lives and loves blighted by trivial misconceptions, which

a word of inquiry or explanation would have cleared away, would false pride have allowed it to be spoken. As yet unable to shake off her love for Harding, and still clinging to her belief that there was a nobility of character about him, she was naturally more disposed to conclude that some such misconception was accountable for his silence, than that he was acting in a mean and cowardly fashion. ‘At any rate,’ she said to herself, ‘there was a reasonable probability that such was the case. There was nothing in matters as they *really* stood to prevent his coming to see them. He was under no engagement to her, and it was quite open to him to say in perfect good feeling that, under existing circumstances, he did not think that it would be well for them that there ever should be any engagement between them; and this being understood, he could still, as the friend of the brother, have been the friend of the family. If there was miscon-

ception, it was upon his part. Should she, then, let *her* false pride prevent her from speaking the word that would make all well, the word that she could speak without compromising her dignity, which, indeed, she owed it to her dignity to speak, in case her mother was right as to the motive that kept Harding away?' After much self-debate, she decided that she would not let pride stand in her way; that she would write to him privately, and by doing so either remove any mistaken impression under which he might be labouring, or gain the melancholy consolation of knowing that he had been unworthy of her love.

None can blind us so readily as we can blind ourselves, and in coming to this resolve Blanche Vernon persuaded herself that she was actuated by high principle, not love. After commencing and tearing up about a dozen others, she at length


completed and despatched the following letter :—

‘ DEAR MR HARDING,

‘ When I tell you that I am writing this without the knowledge of my mother or brother you may, perhaps, think that I am guilty of a want of self-respect. That I am outstepping conventional usage I know ; but I believe I am acting sensibly, unselfishly, and with a motive that justifies the means. I have seen friends grow to be strangers owing to some misunderstanding of which pride has prevented any explanation being asked or offered, and believing that something of the kind is estranging you from us, I put pride aside, and write to you thus.

‘ My mother and Sidney take the fact of our not having heard from you since your return to England as an intimation that you wish all acquaintance between your-

self and our family to cease—on grounds having reference more especially to myself. I feel sure, however, that you do me the justice of understanding that no such reasons need have had the slightest weight in deterring you from renewing your friendship with Sidney, and as his friend, with us. On the other hand, I do you the justice of taking it for granted that you would not allow our change of fortune to alter your feeling of friendship towards us. I, therefore, as I have said, think that there is some mistake, either that we are misjudging the meaning of your silence, or that it is to be attributed to your having received some erroneous impression. If, however, on *any* ground you do wish acquaintance between us to cease, it is perhaps better to hold no communication whatever. In that case, I have only to request that you will look upon this letter as unwritten, or that, if you remember it at all, you will bear in mind that it was not written to ask for




friendship, but only because I would not without very sufficient reason be brought to think meanly of one of whom, *as a friend*, I had thought nobly.

‘Yours truly,

‘BLANCHE VERNON.’

When she had posted this, hope once more rose in her breast. There was no longer the need for self-stultification that there had been while the letter had yet to be written, and she let her true feelings have play. Except in occasional moments of more than ordinary despondency she had never really credited that Harding had changed. Her belief that there was some more or less mysterious misunderstanding, if romantic and such as it might be thought would only have been entertained by some gushing novel-devouring girl, was sincere, and now she argued her letter would lead to an explanation, and *all* would be well. Again she watched eagerly for a letter, but

again day after day passed and none came. Then at last hope withering fled, and a feeling of horror fell upon her. It was not only that she had lost her love, but she felt that she was being helplessly immeshed into accepting a man whom she did not love, who, on the contrary, she had come to dread, and in a certain sense to loathe. When she had become aware that Grainger was in love with her, she had also, as has already been mentioned, become vaguely conscious that there was a something in his character that boded ill for any one that might thwart him in any purpose on the accomplishment of which he had strongly set his mind. His conduct in the strike, which to her had seemed something devilish, had converted this vague feeling into a distressingly distinct one, and she shrank from him in fear and aversion. What she had gone through since the day of her father's death had probably weakened her nerves, for though at times she tried to



pluck up a spirit, and reasoned that after all she was not called upon to sacrifice herself, she knew in her heart of hearts that she was in his toils, and now that Harding's defection was placed beyond doubt, she felt that no chance of escape was left open to her. Her mother was daily fighting Grainger's battle again. She reminded her that she (the mother) had told Grainger the conversation they had held concerning his love for her, and that consequently Grainger had now a right to consider that he had only to propose to be accepted. 'Indeed,' Mrs Vernon went on to say, 'it was evidently only from a delicate regard for Blanche's feelings that he had not already proposed. She dwelt upon the advantages of the match, and argued that to think of refusing him, were he to offer now, would be black ingratitude, and have the appearance of a deliberate intention to wound his feelings, and subject him to one of the greatest humiliations a man can know.'

Blanche made a faint stand on the ground that she had not that love for him which a woman ought to feel for a man before accepting him as her future husband.

‘That,’ said the mother in reply, ‘was nonsense. She had admitted that she thought more highly of him than of any man except Harding, and the latter having put himself out of the question, Grainger was on her own showing *the* man to be accepted by her. As to love, why, there was love and love. As she had told her before, Mr Grainger was not the man to look for a gushing girlish love. Where there was respect and esteem before marriage there generally grew up an undemonstrative, but happy and lasting love after marriage, while still more generally the gushing love faded away, or, worse still, changed its object.’

In these argumentative encounters Blanche was always put down, and in her present state she felt incapable of the



open rebellion and decisive repudiation of the entanglements that had been thrown around her, which alone could save her. So she remained in fear and trembling, wildly hoping that something would occur to avert the threatened event; but at last one evening, about a month after she had written to Harding, the dreaded crisis came upon her.

Grainger had called, and Mrs Vernon had managed to leave Blanche and him alone together.

Her troubles had told injuriously upon her health, and on this evening she was looking unusually pale and worn, and there was an expression of weariness upon her face, unmistakably telling of the struggle and unhappiness within. Grainger noticed this, and the sight moved him. They had been sitting for some minutes in an embarrassing silence when, suddenly rising and going over to her side, he impulsively burst out—

‘Miss Vernon—Blanche, you are ill, this life is killing you by inches. I can’t bear it. Give me the right to take you away from it, to take you where you will, to give you a new life.’

She looked up with a startled air, but without speaking, and after a moment’s pause he hurried on in the same impetuous way—

‘I must speak now, Blanche; I can eat my heart out no longer. You know I love you, I do as only a man like me can, and for months past I’ve suffered as only a man like me can; but I may ask you now if you can love me in return?’

He stopped panting from the violence of his emotion, and stooping over her so that she could feel his hot breath upon her cheek, looked eagerly in her face.

‘Oh, Mr Grainger,’ she stammered, without raising her head. ‘I—I would be grieved to be the cause of pain to you ;



you have been most generous to me,—to us all, and—'

'That is not it, Blanche, that is not it,' he broke in vehemently, though in a soft and trembling voice. 'Will you love me? will you try? all that a man may do to deserve to be loved, I will do. You must, Blanche, you must. Will you be my wife? Say you will; don't refuse me. You don't know how miserable, how mad you will make me if you do!'

Again he was brought to a pause by his own passionate excitement, and again Blanche remained silent, for she was too agitated to speak. He saw this, and presently resumed, in a tone that, though still indicating strongly-wrought feelings, was comparatively self-possessed.

'Forgive me,' he said; 'I see this is distressing you. I won't prolong it. I don't want you to talk—only speak the one word, Blanche; say Yes. Don't be

best with me. In personal friendship her hand :—my love me your friend. You shall make your own time about the rest, and you shall never have cause to regret it. I'll strive to make you happy as I have never known in anything before. I do believe such love as mine must win love; and if it doesn't I will never reproach you. Don't argue me, Elanora; he went on, his tone becoming still gentler. 'Answer me; make me happy: say you will be my wife!'

'Give me all the morning,' she murmured.

'Why?' he questioned abruptly.

'I want to—to collect my thoughts. I'm—I'm thinking of you as well as of myself,' she stammered, still without raising her head.

'Pray think, then,' he said, 'that by saying Yes you can only make me happy, by saying No you can only make me—make me I don't know what! But there!' he ex-

claimed, 'once more forgive me for agitating you so: my own feelings were uncontrollable. Take till the morning, only let me ask you to remember that my happiness is in your hands, and that there is nothing I would not do to give you happiness!'

He paused for a moment irresolute; but seeing that she remained silent and motionless, he left the room with a hasty, irregular step, but with a look of triumph gathering in his face. He had now very little doubt that Blanche's hesitation was the hesitation of a woman who is won, and he looked to the morrow seeing him successful and happy.

Even when she had asked for the night's delay Blanche had felt that she could no longer struggle against the fate that circumstances seemed to force upon her. She strove rather to reconcile herself to it by dwelling upon the more favourable features of it; but notwithstanding

all her efforts to banish them, thoughts of the might-have-been would obtrude themselves. She passed a wretched, sleepless night, and being feverish and restless in the morning, went out for a walk, in the hope of being able to cool and collect herself before being called upon to meet Grainger.

The mile of road running between Mount Pleasant and the little station of the railway directly connecting the district with London was, so far as the smoke and blackness of the neighbourhood would allow, a country road, being — with the exception of about two hundred yards at Gordon's shaft—bordered by fields and marked out by hedgerows interspersed with beech and chestnut trees. Along this road Blanche took her walk. The fresh morning air had a slight effect in allaying the feverish heat in her veins; but it was powerless to medicine to her troubled mind. With eyes bent down-

ward, and painful and conflicting thoughts busy at work within her, she wandered on, scarcely conscious of where she went. She had passed the station, and turned into a field-path a little beyond it, when she became aware that quick footsteps were following her. In the mood she was in a slight thing was calculated to startle her, and as the advancing steps came close upon her she suddenly faced round, and then, with a half-suppressed scream, staggered back—and not without fair excuse—for Lionel Harding stood before her !

CHAPTER II.

CHECK.

HE, too, looked confused and excited. For a few seconds they stood gazing at each other in speechless surprise, and then drawing a long breath he softly said,

‘I am afraid I have alarmed you ; forgive me. I should not have come upon you so abruptly. I acted impulsively. I saw you passing, and rushed after you.’

‘I—I thought—’

‘That I would not come. Do you wish that I had not?’

She made no answer in words, but the bright blush that rose to her cheeks spoke for her

They had been standing a little apart, but now he stepped to her side, and seizing her hand, exclaimed,

‘No, Blanche! my love for you was not the love of an hour, to fade because I was from under the charm of your presence. You have never been absent from my thoughts, and I have come back with my own love deepened, and praying that yours has known no change.’

‘Oh, Lionel,’ she sobbed, ‘I have been so—so unhappy!’

‘I see you have, darling,’ he said tenderly, and drawing her arm within his as he spoke; ‘and, believe me, I would rather suffer myself than add to your unhappiness. *Is* my coming a grief to you?’

‘I hardly know,’ she began; but seeing the look of pain that her words brought into his face, she hastily added, ‘No, no, Lionel, not to me. I could be glad; but let me explain.’

She did explain, letting him know

exactly how matters stood up to the very moment of their meeting.

‘You see how I am placed, Lionel,’ she said in conclusion. ‘Will you advise me—disinterestedly?’

‘I am afraid strict disinterestedness upon my part is scarcely possible,’ he said, smiling; ‘still I think there can be nothing very selfish in advising you not to make yourself wretched for life. There may be positions in which so supreme a sacrifice is called for and should be submitted to; but honestly, I do not think that yours is of that desperate order.’

‘You would have me say No to Mr Grainger?’

‘Most decisively: he deserves it.’

He spoke with an almost savage energy, which caused Blanche to exclaim—
‘Don’t be unjust, Lionel; Mr Grainger has been most kind to us, and is entitled to our utmost gratitude and good-feeling.’

‘Is it only from considerations of

gratitude and good-feeling that you are so reluctant to refuse him?' he asked, looking searchingly into her face. 'You know it is not,' he went on, as she made no answer; 'you fear him, fear what he may do to you and yours if you *do* refuse him. But, Blanche, if I didn't feel confident that I could guard you from the effects of his ill-will I wouldn't advise you to risk incurring it. His kindness! It was all calculation! He is a scoundrel, Blanche!'

'Now you are speaking in passion,' she said remonstratingly; 'you do not like him.'

'Not like him? I hate him!' he exclaimed vehemently. 'But there, don't let us speak of him, or I *shall* be saying more than I ought.'

'That will be the better plan,' she said, with a slight smile. 'You said just now that you saw me passing. From where did you see me?'

‘From the window of the establishment which the landlord chooses to dignify by the name of the Railway Hotel. I got in here last night, and intended to have come on to your place this morning.’

‘And why did you not write before?’

‘I did, Blanche,’ he said quietly, ‘though I find—as I judged was the case, from my receiving no answer to them—that my letters have miscarried.’

‘Did not you get a letter from me, then?’

‘No,’ he said, in the same quiet tone.

‘I sent one addressed to you at the office of your employers.’

‘Well, there has been some muddle,’ he replied; ‘it never came to hand. But never mind what is past just now; let us take counsel about the future.’

Blanche offered no objection, and talking as though it was a thing of course that their present meeting had converted their provisional engagement into a positive

one, they sauntered on, discussing plans and making arrangements. Harding told her that in another year he could enter into a partnership that would place him in a very good business position. That he had thought of filling up the interval by taking out an experimental steamer to China, for his present employers, but that he now thought he had better stay on shore.

But to this Blanche would by no means consent. 'He must not,' she said, 'mar or interfere with his business prospects on her account,—there was no need for him to do so. Now that she would have firm ground to stand upon, she could be firm enough—if occasion for firmness arose.'

Next they spoke of the manner in which he should meet Mrs Vernon, and finally agreed that he should stay in the hotel until evening, when she would get her brother to call upon him, and bring him back to their house.

These matters being settled, they strolled slowly back towards Mount Pleasant, chatting lover-like small talk as they went, and forgetting for the time all save themselves and their own happiness.

Blanche was the first to be disturbed in this pleasant mood. 'I must part from you here,' she said, as they reached a turn of the road that brought her in sight of home.

'Confess now, Blanche,' he said smiling, as he clasped her extended hand, 'you *are* a little afraid of the task that lies before you?'

'I am most sincerely *sorry* to have the task,' she answered seriously. 'His feelings—I speak without any foolish vanity concerning myself—are deeply engaged in this matter, and he will be grievously disappointed.'

'It strikes me that he'll be more than merely disappointed,' answered Harding somewhat grimly. 'He'll be most con-

foundedly surprised and— but there, as I said before, we had better not speak about him. I don't expect you to think about him as I do, but you may take my word for it I am doing him no wrong,—there is no love lost between us, and he is a good hater, and an unscrupulous one. However, that is by the way at present. You'll send Sid as early as you can ?'

'Yes,' she said, and then with a warm and meaning pressure of the hand, they separated.

They had taken no note of the passing of time, and Blanche would probably have been much astonished had she been told that she had been out for three hours. For nearly half of that time Grainger had been waiting for her. He had come in a joyously expectant frame of mind ; but irritated by the delay, and the possibility of his receiving a negative answer which it suggested, he had gradually wrought himself into an evil temper. Mrs Vernon

had sat with him for some time, but after the first half-hour he had given up even the pretence of keeping up a conversation with her, and making some slight excuse, she had left him to himself. At length she had gone back to him, intending to suggest that perhaps he had better call later in the day; but she had scarcely got into the room when Blanche returned, and intercepting her as she would have retreated, exclaimed—‘Oh, mamma, Lionel! He has come,—I have been speaking to him.’

‘What, Harding?’ gasped Grainger, looking dismayed.

‘Yes,’ she answered faintly and with eyes averted.

‘And I suppose he says— What did he say?’

‘Only that he was prevented from coming before,’ she said, as if impelled to answer by the force with which he spoke.

‘And what prevented him?’

‘I don’t know; he did not say,’ she answered in the same way.

‘Excuse me being so rough,’ he said more gently, ‘I scarcely know what I am saying. I will not trouble you further; I need no answer now.’

‘Oh, Mr Grainger, you are not angry with me!’ exclaimed Blanche, impulsively stepping up to him and taking his hand.

‘No, not with you, only with my hard fortune in the affair.’

‘But we will still be friends?’

‘Yes, I will try to school myself to be happy in that since I can be no more,’ he said, attempting to smile; ‘but I must go now: we cannot help our feelings; good-day.’

He dropped her hand, and left the house without another word, but on getting outside he fiercely muttered, ‘D—n him! To be crossed at the eleventh hour like this, and by a fluke too. If he had found out or suspected anything, I could

have understood it. However, all is not lost that is in danger ; my turn may come yet,—it shall somehow or other. It's not only to be even with him ; I love her so that I must have her. I'll sooner go to the devil in winning her than not win her at all.'

After avowing his attachment to Miss Wilkinson, Sidney Vernon ceased to be his mother's ally in urging the Grainger match upon Blanche. He could not well use 'match' arguments with her while refusing to admit their cogency in his own case. 'Of course,' he said, 'a marriage with Grainger would be "no end of a good thing" for them all, as far as money and all that went, but if Blanche found not only that she really could not fancy him, but that she *did* fancy some one else, why then there was no use talking about it. And so Lal has turned up after all?' he said, when his sister told him. 'I ought to have known that he would after what I

had seen of his manliness. I will go and bring him here at once.'

'You will receive him kindly, won't you?' Blanche pleaded to her mother when Sidney had gone.

'Well, I cannot profess to be rejoiced over his coming, Blanche,' she answered, 'still I will try to be just. I confess that I judged him wrongly, and you may depend upon my being at least perfectly civil to him.'

Apart from his having interfered with her ambitious views about Blanche, Mrs Vernon had liked Harding very much, and now she found her thoughts softening towards him again. Conventional as she was, she was yet sufficient of a true woman to think all the more of him for showing that he was not influenced by mere considerations of fortune; moreover, she was already endeavouring to reconcile herself to and think the best of the apparently inevitable. When Harding came she did re-

ceive him civilly, and his genial, pleasantly self-confident manner rapidly thawing the slight iciness that at first characterized her bearing, the evening passed very pleasantly, and when he went away she found herself gathering consolation from the thought that, if not so rich a man as Grainger, he was 'nicer.' Harding evaded the subject of the miscarriage of the letters, but upon every other he was very free and open. He spoke of his pecuniary position and business prospects, and renewed his offer of giving up his sea-going engagement. But the mother and brother agreed with Blanche in saying that they saw no need for his interfering with his arrangements; and then he informed them that in that case his visit would only last for a few days, as he would be called upon to join his ship.

To explain Harding's unexpected and, for his own interests, opportune appearance, it will be necessary to describe a

scene that occurred on the night preceding the one of his arrival in the Black Country. He was seated in his lodgings in a rather moping mood, when the servant announced that a man wanted to see him. Her manner solicited question, and so he asked, 'What sort of a man?'

'A big, rough-looking man, sir,' the girl replied, 'and meaning no offence, sir, I think he's been drinking. He looks quite wild, and he says you don't know either him or his name, but that you had better see him for all that.'

'Better for your own sake, I meant,' said a deep voice, and without waiting for an invitation, Jim Harrison—for he was the caller—having followed the girl up-stairs, entered the room. The servant's description of him was a very apt one. Illness had made him look gaunt and raw-boned, and being half-drunk and greatly excited, he certainly looked a wild customer.

‘Are you Mr Harding?’ he asked abruptly as soon as the servant had gone.

‘I’m ‘ Mr Harding,’ Lionel answered.

‘Mr Lionel Harding; letters in care of Parker and Son,’ his visitor broke in.

‘Well, letters so addressed would reach me—’

‘That’s near enough,’ the other exclaimed, again cutting him short. ‘You are my man! Look here, I believe I can do you a good turn; but as I dare say you don’t believe in good turns being done by strangers for nothing, I tell you at once that I only want to do it because it will at the same time be doing a bad turn to a fellow I hate, so that I would sell my soul to cross him!’

‘Ah, that is your affair,’ said Harding, coldly.

‘I know it is,’ said the other. ‘You needn’t be afraid that I want you to fight my battle or do any wrong. Whatever wrong there is in the business is being



done against you and another—a young lady.’

Harding’s thoughts instantly reverted to Blanche Vernon, and he excitedly exclaimed, ‘What’s that?’

‘Ah, that touches you, does it?’ said the other, flinging himself into a chair. ‘You begin to feel; I can talk to you now. You know the lady? I mean—Miss Vernon?’

‘Yes, yes!’ answered Harding impatiently; ‘what of her, or of any wrong to her?’

‘You would fast enough put a spoke in the wheel of any one who tried to separate you and her by foul play, wouldn’t you?’ the other asked with a sort of savage glee.

‘I’d strangle him if need were,’ Harding ground out between his teeth.

‘That’s the sort,’ shouted Harrison, whose passion seemed to be intensified by the sight of Harding’s. ‘I knew how it would be if you cared for her and had a grain of

the man in you. But you can't feel that as I can. I *will* strangle him, or have his life somehow. I've sworn it, and I'll do it. I'll wash my hands in his blood before I'm done.' He lay back in his seat panting heavily, and glared around him with blood-shot eyes. At first Harding thought he was going into a fit, but in a few seconds he recovered: 'I didn't mean that there should have been anything of this kind,' he said, speaking more calmly. 'But I lose my head a bit sometimes now, and I've been drinking. At the same time don't think I'm speaking either in mere drunkenness or madness—you will know more about me some day, perhaps.'

'Perhaps,' said Harding; 'but excuse me, you have made me feel very anxious. May I ask what you have to tell me or wish me to do?'

'You wrote to Mrs Vernon from Stonebury, telling her that you had come home from sea, and giving her to understand

that you wished to renew your intimacy with the family?'

'Yes,' said Harding, looking at the other in surprise.

'Getting no answer, you wrote to her son to the same effect?'

'Yes.'

'And not hearing from him either, you wrote to Miss Vernon, and still getting no answer, you sent her a second letter, saying that you could not believe that under any circumstances she would treat you with unkindness and contempt, and that unless you received a reply by return of post you would conclude that there was some misunderstanding or miscarriage, and come on without further delay?'

This time Harding merely nodded assent, and Harrison resumed: 'You did receive a reply by return of post, telling you that she regretted that you had not taken the fact of your receiving no answer to your letters *as* an answer, and going on to

say that while she would always have a kindly remembrance of you, her feelings—not to speak of her circumstances—had undergone a change, and that she was now in such a position with regard to another man as made it improper for her to hold any communication with you.'

'That was the substance of it,' said Harding, more and more amazed.

'Well, that letter was a forgery!'

'A forgery?' echoed Harding, springing to his feet.

'Yes, a forgery!' repeated Harrison emphatically. 'Miss Vernon never penned a line of it, never knew that it was written. She wrote a letter you didn't get, but there is a copy of it.'

As he spoke he took out a pocket-book, and drawing a paper from it, tossed it to Harding. It was a literal copy of the letter the reader has already seen. Harding read it eagerly; and when the other, who was watching his eyes, saw that

he was at the end of it, he went on, 'You see your letters never reached the Vernons, and I can tell you why. They were stopped by—'

'Grainger, in some way or other, I'll swear!' burst in Harding. 'I might have guessed that there was some devil's work going on.'

'Oh, you know him, then?' said Harrison with a grating laugh; 'you give him credit for not sticking at trifles to gain his ends.'

'But was it him?' asked Harding impatiently.

'Yes.'

'Then, curse him! I'll be even with him.'

'You have only got to go to the Vernons at once to do that, I should fancy; that is what I want you to do. Your turning up would cut him out, and that would be like poison to him in every way, for I believe he is slavishly fond of her. I

suppose he stands out in a separate way
out of the way? If course you'll not be
questioned seeing the other standing as if
not in thought.

Is this action entirely in him
then? What standing

I don't know that she is: but if she
isn't she won't be if he is left alone.
He is in the house pretty near every day

But how do you know all this? Why
are you? And standing who seemed un-
involved by the surprise he had undergone.

Is it that I am not sure is standing :
if you want to test more about me what
all you get up to in action's and then ask
some one who knows the whole there
about to tell you who am standing is
and what cause he has for having other
standing. Is it how I know what I have
been telling, that is my secret and I am
going to keep it: and what is more, you
mustn't repeat what you have heard to
any one from whom there is the least

chance of its getting to Grainger's ears.'

'What, not expose the villain!' exclaimed Harding.

'No! You must be satisfied with defeating him,—you owe that much to me. If he knew this had got out at all he would know through whom, and he has it in his power to crush that party, and he would crush them. I can't force you to make any promise now, but I'll trust to your honour as a gentleman, not to bring trouble upon those who you will find have greatly befriended you—even if it was to serve their own ends.'

'I should be very ungrateful to injure you, whatever motive you may have acted from,' Harding replied; and after some further talk it was agreed that with the Vernons he should pass over the non-receipt of the letters as lightly as possible, making no suggestion whatever of trickery.

On the following afternoon he started

for the Black Country, and met Blanche Vernon in the way we have seen.

On the evening preceding the day of Harding's departure Mrs Vernon invited The Parson and Mr Barber to a little dinner to meet him ; but the party was by no means a success, Harding being noticeably dull and cold. This might easily have been attributed to a state of feeling brought about by the near prospect of his separation from his love, but it had the effect of piquing Barber. Though Harding and he had only met once before, they had got on very well together, and he had taken a liking to him. That meeting had taken place before Harding had seen Grainger, and Barber's idea now was that Harding's coolness was intended for him. 'I suppose,' he thought—and the supposition annoyed him—'he thinks that I am Grainger's servant, and as a consequence his partisan and toady, and likely to carry anything that may be said here.'

This notion again occurred to his mind when on his way to the office next day he met Harding going towards Mount Pleasant. The tone in which Harding returned his good-morning confirmed him in his impression; and by way of letting the other know that he understood the reason of his change of manner, he laughingly but meaningly observed, 'You should not visit the sins of the master upon the servant.'

'Are there any sins to visit?'

'The sin of rivalry.'

'*Fair* rivalry is no sin,' said Harding, with an unmistakable emphasis on the first word. 'Do you allude to anything unfair?'

'No; my allusion was general, though I can see that your view is that if I did know of anything unfair, I would have neither the will nor the courage to speak of it; that, in fact, I would wink at if not assist in it, lest I should offend—my master.'

‘No, my love,’ exclaimed Harding. ‘There you are both wrong. I know I seemed ~~stupid~~ ~~stupid~~ last night; but that was simply because I felt ~~stupid~~ ~~stupid~~, as I do still. And that reminds me that I should have asked “Well-met” to my “Good-morning.” I was in my way to your house to ask you to allow me to make a contribution to your room a subject that will at any rate show that I don’t think you slavishly disposed towards ~~him~~ ~~him~~. I am going—if you accept my confidence—to speak evil of him, and ask you to undertake a charge which might bring you into collision with him.’

‘I would risk that in a good cause,’ he said smiling.

‘It is a good cause!’ exclaimed Harding energetically. ‘I want you to keep a protective watch over Miss Vernon.’

‘Shall we turn back to my place or walk on?’

‘Walk on; it will be on my road to



the inn, and I want to see my traps packed.'

'In what way can I be of service to Miss Vernon?' Barber asked, when they had walked some little distance and Harding showed signs of falling into a reverie.

'Oh yes!' said Harding, rousing. 'But, in the first place, I must ask you to promise me that in case you do not care about interesting yourself in the matter you will not repeat anything of what I tell you.'

'Most certainly, I take that to be understood. If I cannot do any good I will not do any harm.'

'Of course,' said Harding, in a sort of parenthetical tone, 'her brother would have been the proper person to have told this to, if he had been the fittest; but he is not. With all due respect to Sid, he is anything but stable; and this affair is one that would require to be not only cleverly,

but firmly needed. I say this by way of
excuse for troubling you.

"I don't think you say it in better re-
lationship I feel a little better," said Har-
ber. "But what's the matter?"

"Well, I feel better now than the story
from beginning to end," he replied: and
evidently he proceeded to give him a
minute account of the strange interview
with Harrison.

"Of course, having come so years of
experience, one ought to give up being
astonished at anything," said Barber, as
the other continued: "but I must say that
you have astonished me, and you have
puzzled me still more. I can't see my way
at all."

"Do you mean to believing it?" asked
Harding sharply.

"Oh no: to understanding it. Your
own corroborative knowledge of facts de-
monstrate it to be as true as strange. Still

I am utterly at a loss to see either how Grainger could have done it, or Harrison find out that it had been done.'

'Oh, while I remember,' exclaimed Harding, 'can you tell me who and what Harrison is, and what grudge he has against Grainger?'

In reply Barber told him what he knew.

'Poor fellow!' said Harding; 'he has indeed cause to hate him. All the same it would be a pity to see him wreck himself in the attempt to be revenged. To judge from what I saw of him that night, it would not at all surprise me to hear of his attempting to carry out his threat of murdering him!'

'I shall be surprised if I *don't* hear of his attempting; still that does not give me any clue as to how he could have got hold of this affair.'

'I take it that he must have got his information through the second party; the

"I am a woman who has been a—since the
 world has been the world."

"I am a woman who is a woman, and I am."

"I am a woman who is a woman, and I am
 a woman. I am a woman who is a woman, and I am
 a woman."

"I am a woman who is a woman, and I am
 a woman. I am a woman who is a woman, and I am
 a woman."

"I never thought of that. Yes, I
 suppose it was in an ordinary lady-like
 way, as otherwise it would have struck
 me as strange. You know I had no par-
 ticular acquaintance with Blanche's writ-
 ing, and I wrote the letter. Is there any
 woman here whom you think Grainger
 might have got to help him in such a
 business?"

"Well, it's a wild idea, and a jumped-
 at one, and, understand me, I only men-
 tion it in confidence, and merely as a pos-
 sibility. Have you heard the Vernons
 speak of Miss Wilkinson?"

‘Yes, I have heard Sidney speak a good deal about her. Is it her that you suspect?’

‘Well, suspect is too strong a word, but she is the person to whom my idea refers. She is a handsome, passionate, ambitious girl, and before Grainger met the Vernons there was some love-making between him and her. She thought she had secured him, but when the Vernons came here she saw that her chance was gone. She made no sign, but such a girl would naturally feel the thing keenly. Though she seems to have accepted Sidney’s addresses, I fancy she is even yet fonder of Grainger than any other man, and he may in some way have wrought upon that feeling to get her to help him. She may have found some sort of satisfaction in the idea that she was helping to force her successful rival into a marriage she loathed; or in any one of the thousand

and once the night came it is the
 end of the story of a woman in connection
 with the complications.

“I tell you what,” said Harding, who
 was listened with the keenest attention.
 “he may have joined him in the work
 with a deliberate purpose of betraying and
 defeating him.”

“Oh, yes, that is the better guess. It
 was rather far-fetched to think of her doing
 it from love. Revenge has been the motive:
 I suppose it’s about time that hell has no
 fury like a woman scorned.”

“Does she know Harrison?”

“She would be sure to know him by
 reputation, and to be aware of what took
 place between Grainger and him over the
 strike. She would know that she might
 very safely trust him to keep faith with
 her, and assist her in any plot to injure
 Grainger.”

“After all, though,” said Harding, “we
 but guess on this point, and my first

object just now is not so much to find out who his co-conspirator may have been, as to ask you to try to guard Blanche from any further plotting when I am gone.'

'In what way?'

'Well, I can hardly say; I mean generally. You are clever; and knowing that there is a possibility of plotting, and being on the alert, you might be able to detect the first indications of it, and without showing your hand counteract it, or warn Blanche, or something.'

'Yes, I might,' Barber said.

'And will you—willingly? That is the favour I want to ask of you—for Miss Vernon's sake, for of course I have no claim upon you personally.'


'Well, as far as that goes, Harding, we may have a more friendly feeling for one man after only meeting him once or twice, than for another after being in contact with him for years. But putting aside all personal considerations, I would do what

you ask on grounds of common manhood; and I promise you that I will.'

'Thank you,' said Harding, coming to a standstill, for he knew sufficient of the road to be aware that he had taken Barber past the point at which he had to turn off to reach the office; 'thank you!,' he exclaimed, warmly grasping his hand. 'I can't tell you how much I feel relieved, I won't try to say how grateful I feel. I shall go away comparatively happy now. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' said Barber, returning the pressure of his hand: 'good-bye and good fortune.'

Later the same day Sidney Vernon, in accordance with a previous arrangement, came down to the inn, and lunched with Harding. For some time they talked upon commonplace subjects, but at last Harding with an embarrassed air said, 'Well, there is no use beating about the bush any longer, Sid. I hardly know how to say



what I want to say; but I asked you to come down here with a special object.'

'It's nothing *very* shocking, I hope?' said Sidney smiling.

'Well, it is so unconventional that some people might consider it shocking, though I should be sorry to think that you would be so wrong-headed.'

'Well, you might be sure I would not be likely to stand upon conventionalities with you.'

'Of course not,' said Harding, though his tone was rather doubting than confident; 'that is why I decided upon putting this thing to you—'

He stopped hesitatingly, and Vernon asked, 'But what thing is it, Lal?'

'Why, you see, Sid,' he exclaimed, making a sort of rush at the subject, 'Grainger won't feel comfortable under what has happened. He may want to break with your people, or he might turn overbearing and drive you into breaking

with him, or something of the kind may happen.'

'Well?' said Vernon, as the doctor came to a stop.

'Well, the fact is,' replied Harding with another rush. 'I want you to be in charge of part of my savings while I am away, and then if it so fall out that you wanted time to look around you, you might as well use it.'

'I understand you, old fellow,' said Vernon, 'and it is very good of you; but I can only thank you for the offer. I can't accept it,—it would not be manly to do so.'

'No, you don't *quite* understand me, Sid,' Harding replied. 'I would never have dreamt of mentioning such a thing if you alone had been concerned. I was thinking of your mother and Blanche. Situations are not always to be picked up at any hour, and I would not like you to feel yourself in a place where things *might* be made

unpleasant for Blanche. I don't say that there will be any call for what I propose, but consider it a crotchet of mine, and humour me in it. What I want to do is this: my money is in a Liverpool bank; run down there with me when I go away, and then I will call at the bank, get a cheque book, give you a cheque for a thousand, and tell the bankers that I have left a signed cheque payable to your order behind me. If it is not wanted, there is no harm done; in an emergency it will be at command.'

'I can't see the necessity for such a provision,' objected Vernon.

'I couldn't say myself that there is a necessity for it,' Harding answered; 'but then it isn't a question of seeing a need for it, but of humouring me. Come, Sid, oblige me: I shall only be making myself miserable when I am away if you don't;' and after a little further persuasion the other yielded.

Shortly afterwards they went up to Mount Pleasant together for Harding to say his farewells.

Of the parting between Blanche and him little more need be said than that it was a lovers' parting,—a parting of sweet sorrow, in which there was much lingering, and much low impassioned talk, mingled with 'silence that spoke and eloquence of eyes.' Harding threw out some guarded hints of the possibility of treachery; but as they were very vague, and Blanche was agitated, she failed to catch their significance. At length the moment arrived when their separation could be no longer deferred, and Harding, drawing her to his breast, exclaimed in a voice trembling from passion, 'Good-bye, Blanche! my own Blanche, for you are mine now. And remember, darling, you must never think again that I am not coming back to you, no matter what you may hear. Unless you know that I am dead you will

know that I will return to claim you—as my wife, Blanche, my wife.’

She made no answer, but he could feel her heart beating tumultuously against his own; and he dropped his voice to a tender whisper as he said, ‘You’ll think of me sometimes when I am away, won’t you, Blanche?’

‘Always, Lionel,’ she whispered back, raising her face to his, and then with one long fervent kiss they parted.

CHAPTER III.

FORTUNE FAVOURS MR GRAINGER.

IT is often cited as a characteristic of London that a person may live in it for years—that thousands of people *do* live in it for years—without knowing the name of their next-door neighbour. In a lesser degree the same thing may be observed of the larger and busier provincial towns, but in smaller, more isolated places the reverse of this is the case, and it was so in Mount Pleasant. If the inhabitants of that oasis of gentility in the desert of the Black Country roughness did not always love their neighbours as themselves, they at least tried to know their neighbours’

business as their own. They dearly loved to discuss their neighbours' doings, and particularly those of their great neighbour, Mr Grainger, and in this respect they had had quite a feast since the Vernons had come among them.

Grainger's frequent visits to the family at Stonebury had of course been noted, but at that time there had been a division of opinion as to the motives of the visits; for while some held that it was the daughter who was the attraction, others had pooh-pooh'd the notion, saying that he was too hard-headed for anything of that kind, and maintaining that it was the father he was courting, with a view to making use of him in some business scheme. Those holding the latter opinion had, however, been fain to acknowledge themselves mistaken after the death of Clive Vernon; and it having been unanimously settled that Grainger was in love with Blanche, the Mount Pleasanters set-

tled themselves to the work of taking note of his proceedings towards her. Some of them had friends in Stonebury from whom they could make inquiries, and it was soon current at the Mount that Blanche had been 'a sort of engaged to a young fellow, a friend of her brother's; but,' it was added, as settling that part of the business, 'the young fellow in question was quite poor.'

It was not for a moment supposed that there would be any coldness upon Blanche's part: the watching was rather to see in what mode she and her family would angle to make sure of securing the great match, and how Florence Wilkinson would bear herself in the matter. The result of all this neighbourly observation was, however, merely to afford room for guess-work.

No details, and nothing definite even in a general way, could be learned; but it was set down that the suitorship of Sidney Vernon had disarmed any resentment that



Florence might have felt, and that Grainger, as he visited the Vernons with increasing frequency, was progressing in his courtship to his own satisfaction. This much was taken for granted, and when he would be married, and whether after his marriage he would continue to live at the Mount, were the questions being discussed, when Harding appeared upon the scene and set the gossippers all agog again. They at once jumped to the conclusion that he was the young fellow to whom Blanche had been 'a sort of engaged,' and they saw that he was a handsome resolute-looking young fellow, just such a man as a girl *might* love without considering whether he was rich or poor, and loving, stand by against all other suitors, without reference to *their* being rich or poor; and who thus loved and stood by, would not be likely to allow secondary considerations to thwart him or to allow a rival to persecute his lady-love with impunity.

This much could be gathered from a glance at his face; and as it was known that he had been received by the Vernons in a manner that would scarcely have been extended to a discarded lover, the possibility of Mr Grainger being 'cut out' began to be realized.

But *had* he been cut out? that was the question that arose when on the expiration of his brief visit Harding departed, and on this point the great man's neighbours were fortunate enough to get more definite information than they had been able to do upon others.

Since the Vernons had settled at the Mount Dick Wilkinson had kept up an intermittent flirtation with Polly Mansell. The latter had conceived a dislike to Mr Grainger, and having gathered a correct general idea of how things had gone with that gentleman in consequence of the appearance of Harding, she had reminded Wilkinson of the conversation they had

held in Stonebury on the relative chances of the rivals for Blanche's hand, and then triumphantly asked, 'Didn't I tell you how it would be with your great Mr Grainger, for all his riches? With his making the most of having obliged them,' she had gone on, without waiting for a reply, 'and always hanging after her, and her thinking Mr Harding wasn't coming back, and one thing and another, he had all but forced himself on her; but when Mr Harding *did* come he was soon sent to the rightabout. She's regularly engaged to Mr Harding now.'

So the news of Mr Grainger's overthrow was started on its way abroad among the Mount Pleasants. Dick Wilkinson, founding his assertion on what he had heard from Polly, informed a married fellow clerk that 'the extinguisher had been put upon Grainger.' The clerk repeated the information to his wife, who hastened to tell her friends, who in their

turn told their friends, so that within a day or two the great man's defeat was in 'everybody's' mouth, 'and none did pity him.' On the contrary, there was general rejoicing at his being baulked and 'brought down a peg,' for among the gentility of the Mount, as among the rougher work-people, his overbearing, overreaching manner had made him disliked.

In the first instance the news was received with sneers and laughter and affected astonishment, at the idea of the great Grainger being baffled in any matter on which he had set his heart; then came more curious watching and 'wondering,' and guessing as to how he would take it and what he would do. The common idea was that he would 'turn nasty,' would discharge Sidney Vernon from his employment, and come down upon the family generally if they owed him money, or were in any other way in his power. The wish that he should show himself in

so contemptible a light was, perhaps, father to the thought, but in any case it was disappointed.

Lookers-on would scarcely have gathered from their own observation that there had been any change in his relations with the family. He called at the house less frequently than formerly, and that was about all they could say. On the one or two occasions upon which they had an opportunity of seeing Grainger and Blanche out-of-doors together, they were unable to detect any alteration in their manner, which had never had in it any of that gush, which in the case of some individuals palpably distinguishes the lover-like from the simply friendly manner.

After what Harding had told him, Barber regarded his employer's unaltered bearing towards the Vernons with suspicion as well as curiosity. To his mind it savoured of further plotting; but though he watched warily and closely, he could

not discover anything in the nature of a clue to what the plotting might be. He was not, as we know, a sentimental person; but he felt strongly in this matter. *He* was not in love with Blanche; but he had conceived a great admiration for her character and a very decided goodwill towards herself; and, apart from his promise to Harding, he was personally anxious to save her from Grainger. He did not, in his own mind, go to the length of imputing blood-guiltiness to his employer, in regard to Clive Vernon's death; but he always remembered how greatly and *intentionally* instrumental he had been in bringing about the crisis that had led to his taking his own life. The thought had often occurred to him, that if Blanche were married to Grainger, and was afterwards to be made aware of this circumstance, she would go mad or commit some desperate action. To these higher motives was now added pique at his failure to get upon the

track of the plotting which he felt sure was being carried on, and as a last resource, he resolved to try and feel his way by trying to 'draw' Grainger himself.

'Can you look in at my place in the evening?' the great man would often say to Barber when it happened that from press of the routine business of the day they had not time fully to discuss some new affair in the office.

Barber would answer that he could, and when the business topic had been discussed, he usually stayed to supper, and the two chatted about things in general. Making an opportunity of one of these occasions, Barber following up the business discussion so as to give his question an air of having been suggested by it, asked,—
'Do you know whether it is hereabout that Harding intends setting up? I understand he *is* going to start on his own account when he has married Miss Vernon.'

'I understand he *is* *if* he marries Miss

Vernon,' the other answered instantly, turning sullen.

'Well, I suppose there is very little "if" about the matter,' said Barber, with a slightly amused smile that evidently aggravated the other. 'You remember I told you that I-will-ism wasn't to be relied on where women's feelings or men's passions were concerned; seeking to force them, it becomes, as I said, a thorn in the flesh.'

'Yes; and, as *I* said, a thorn that may wound third parties.'

'I'll admit the general "may,"' answered Barber, still speaking in a tone that irritated the other; 'but that chance has gone by in this case.'

'Oh, has it?' sneered Grainger. 'I thought one of your favourite maxims was that a battle was never lost till it was won?'

'So it is; but, as I take it, the battle is won here. The conquering hero *has*

been. The lovers are united, and their love-troths are plighted, and all the rest of it.'

'No, not *all* the rest of it,' said Grain-ger, with angry emphasis; 'it will be time enough to say that when they are married—if they should be.'

'Well, I don't think there is much room for doubt on that point; at the same time I wouldn't have mentioned the subject if I had thought you still felt that way about it. I believed you had done the magnanimous, had gracefully retired, and ceased to think of the young lady, except as a friend.'

'Oh, that's what you would call doing the magnanimous, is it?' exclaimed Grain-ger. 'The milk-and-watery I should call it. I should have fancied you knew me better than that. You may consider the battle quite won, but I don't consider it quite lost. I retired because it was my policy to do so, and on a friendly footing, so that

I might be in the best position for coming forward again if a chance offered.'

'I don't think there is any likelihood of that,' said Barber.

'Well, we'll see,' retorted Grainger; 'there's always the chapter of accidents, and—'

He paused abruptly, and then concluded, 'But time will show. Say no more about it.'


Barber's purpose had been to work the other into a passion, in the hope that he would blurt out something that would indicate the nature of his designs. In the first part of his object he had, as we have seen, been tolerably successful, in the second he had been disappointed. His belief that Grainger did mean further plotting was confirmed, but he had not gained the faintest idea of the direction his plots might take, or of how he could interfere to overthrow them.

In this state things remained for

about three months, and then there arose a phase in Grainger's proceedings, which revived the by that time drooping interest of the Mount Pleasants generally, and grievously exercised Barber, as to how it could bear upon his avowed intention of yet winning Blanche if he could.

Grainger's attentions to Florence Wilkinson were suddenly, and, as it seemed to observers, most ardently renewed. His devotion to her in public became more marked than ever, and those who had the best opportunity of noticing them closely on such occasions averred that curiously meaning glances passed between them. They were known to meet at other times too, and the women said that she now wore jewelry which could only be the gift of a wealthy man, while all were agreed that she showed an imperiousness not only with those around her, but also with Grainger himself, that could only be reconciled with the idea that she at any

rate felt confident of securing the power and position which a match with him would give. Her manner in this respect of course gave offence, especially to her own sex, who pronounced her a vain upstart minx, and moreover professed to condemn her on sentimental grounds also. Sidney Vernon continued his attentions to her, and, so far as others could judge, was still received with a considerable degree of favour, and the general impression upon this point was that she really cared most for him as a man, but was dazzled by Grainger's riches. This piece of rivalry gave additional interest to the love-comedy of the Mount; but while lookers-on were preparing to witness a dénouement in the shape of 'the triumph of humble beauty,' probably over riches in the person of Grainger, possibly over its own vanity, in finally rejecting proffered wealth for love; while they were confidently expecting to hear of Florence's



marriage, or at the least definite engagement to one or other of her admirers, there came a change of circumstance that dashed her more ambitious hopes, and was destined to introduce an element of tragedy into the little life-play of which she was for the time being a central figure.

One morning The Parson while at breakfast was surprised by his servant announcing that Mr Grainger was in the sitting-room, and wished to see him 'immediate.' He went to him at once, and seeing him pale and excited, exclaimed, 'What is it, Mr Grainger? no accident at the mines, I hope?'

'No, no, nothing of that,' Grainger answered; 'but I want you to break bad news to the Vernons,—you are fitter than me. It might be thought that I was anything but sorry about it. Harding is gone.'

'Dead, do you mean?' exclaimed The Parson.

‘Yes: listen to this.’ As he spoke he took from his pocket a copy of a London evening paper that he received each morning by post. A second or two was occupied in unfolding the paper and finding the paragraph he wanted, and then in a quick, trembling voice he read—

‘The Fleet-wing, which arrived from China this morning, brings intelligence of the foundering—or, to speak strictly, the capsizing—of the English steamer Hybred, with the loss of all hands. She was an experiment in naval architecture, and, as the event has shown, an unfortunate one. She was intended to act as a convoy to merchant ships in pirate-infested parts of the Chinese waters, and to that end had been built as a combination of turreted gun-boat and ordinary steamer. Our readers may remember that at the time of her launch she was the object of a considerable amount of discussion, her designers, builders, and those of their in-



clining asserting that she was all that could be desired, while others versed in such matters gave it as their opinion that she was greatly wanting in stability, and would be very likely to prove a coffin to her crew if she were sharply caught by a gale. The latter view has turned out to be but too literally true. She reached Hong-Kong safely, and after staying there for a few days, started for another Chinese port. She had only been gone a few hours when she *was* "sharply caught by a gale," and within sight of a sailing ship, only three miles away, turned over, floated bottom upwards for a minute or two, and then sank, "coffining" her crew.'

'There,' Grainger went on, ceasing to read, and bringing the paper under The Parson's eyes, 'is a list of the crew, you see,—Lionel Harding, chief engineer.'

'Poor young fellow! it was a sudden end,' The Parson said softly; 'it will indeed be bad news for Miss Vernon.'


'Believe me, Mr Grahame, I am truly sorry for her,' said Grainger; 'you'll break it gently to her?'

'As gently as I can,' The Parson answered; 'and I'll go soon, or she may learn it in some more abrupt fashion, after the morning papers get down here.'

'That was my idea in coming to you,' the other answered, as he went to the door, on the threshold of which he turned, and speaking in a questioning tone, said, 'Perhaps you will be kind enough to let me know how she bears it.'

The Parson nodded affirmatively, and then Grainger went on his way, really experiencing something of genuine pity for Blanche, but much more of a sense of satisfaction at the death of his rival, though with his feeling of triumph on this point there came intruding sundry unpleasant thoughts in relation to Florence Wilkinson.

From The Parson's Grainger went to his office, where he found Barber at his



desk opening the business letters of the day. After bidding him good-morning, he paced to and fro for a minute or two, and then without pausing in his walk, exclaimed—

‘Look here, Barber, I’m a pretty good hater, I’ll allow, but I wouldn’t carry ill-will beyond the grave, so understand I have no vindictive satisfaction in what I am going to tell you.’

‘Well?’ said Barber, looking up in surprise.

‘Well, you remember us talking about me still having hopes of winning Miss Vernon?’

‘Yes.’

‘And me saying that *I* didn’t consider the battle lost; that till all was actually over there was always the chapter of accidents to trust to for turning the fortune of war.’

Barber nodded assent, and the other went on—‘Well, when I said it I had little

thought of how soon and how fully accident would play into my hands. Look there !'

He brought out the newspaper as he spoke, and pointing to the paragraph recounting the loss of the Hybred, handed it to him.

Barber read it, and then letting the paper fall from his hands, and speaking as if unconscious of Grainger's presence, he murmured : ' Poor Harding ! I know his thoughts would fly here as he went down.'

' Does Miss Vernon know ?' he asked, rousing himself.

' By this time she does. As soon as I saw the news I went to Mr Grahame and asked him to break it to her. I thought it would be better him than me, though I felt as sorry—'

Involuntarily Barber glanced searchingly at the other's face with a look about the meaning of which there could be little doubt.

Grainger instantly read it aright, and replied to it, 'Well, not altogether sorry that it has happened, perhaps—there is no use in saying that, to you at any rate, for you wouldn't believe me if I did—but I am sorry for her. I've never put myself in a fool's paradise over the matter. I knew from the very hour that I first saw them together that she thought more of him than me, and I know what a sore heart this news will give her, and that is why I am sorry—that such grief as I know she will feel should be brought upon her by *anything*.'

'I can readily enough believe that,' answered Barber, and he could, for the other spoke with unmistakable earnestness.

'I am,' Grainger repeated. 'I didn't like him, but I can say now that he was a fellow that I could understand her caring for as she did. But whatever he was he couldn't have cared more for her than I do. He couldn't have been willing to do more

for her than I am, or able to do so much. I'll make it all up to her; I'll make her happy, if it should be in spite of herself.'

This last assertion Barber could *not* 'readily believe,' and so he made no answer. His idea was that Grainger could not but make Blanche miserable, in spite of *himself*, and further thought after Grainger had left him only confirmed him in this impression.

'Poor girl!' his musings ran, 'it seems as though he was fated to be her evil genius, as he was her father's. With her spirits broken by this event, a sense of obligation weighing her down, and the plea of "engaged" taken from her, he'll carry his point.'

The conclusion was not a pleasant one for him to dwell upon, and he attempted to drive it from his mind by plunging into his work; but he had scarcely taken up the pen when there came a sudden flushing of his face, and speaking half-aloud, he ex-

claimed, 'By Jove, I wonder whether this is in any way a move of Grainger's?' He paused for a moment, startled by his own idea, and then his voice sinking into a whisper, he added, 'But no! It is only my own head running on the notion that he is plotting. There would be no use in his getting a thing like that into the papers, even if he could. It is circumstantial, and would be contradicted within the day. However, as a whim, I will be assured.'

In pursuance of this resolve he wrote to the owners of the Hybred, and received in reply a letter informing him that it was but too true,—that she had been lost as stated in the papers, that there was no other vessel either of her name or build, and no possible doubt about the Mr Lionel Harding who had perished in her being the gentleman of that name who had been in the employ of Parker & Son.

Harding's profession and the name of the vessel he had sailed in were among

the things which the inhabitants of the Mount had learned concerning him, and when, about noon, the daily papers came in, the news of his death spread rapidly among them. It was an unexpected and tragic incident in the drama of which they had constituted themselves spectators, and the first impulsive feeling excited by it was one of commiseration for Blanche, but this soon gave way to one of curiosity as to how the event would affect the development of the play to which it was immediately concluded it would give a new turn and fresh interest. Would Grainger renew his suit to Miss Vernon now that there was no living rival to bar his path? If he did, how would she receive it? and what would spoilt, imperious, hot-blooded Florence Wilkinson say or do if she found herself 'daft aside' a second time?

These were the queries that occurred to the people of the Mount. It was not

long before they were able to infer an answer on the first point. After Grainger had begun to pay marked attention to Florence again he had almost entirely ceased to call upon the Vernons, but now his visiting was resumed, and was carried on daily, while his manner towards Florence became distant and embarrassed, and it was evident that he sought to avoid her company, and especially in circumstances under which there was any prospect of their being thrown together alone. That this change in his actions and manner meant the substantial, even if not the formal, renewal of his addresses to Blanche was set down as a matter about which there could be no doubt; but on the other points they were at a loss. They could see that Florence Wilkinson was enraged, and there was hope as well as expectation that she would make some sensational display of her anger; but however passionate her feelings might have been, she retained

sufficient control over them not to make sport for these Philistines. When people had for the second time been commenting upon Grainger's attentions to her, her brother had again questioned her on the subject, but she had again silenced him with generalities, saying that she was not responsible for other people's talk, that she was quite capable of taking care of her own reputation, and the like. But now, as he saw her cheek grow pale and her temper become fitful and moody, he once more returned to the subject. They were sitting together at home, and he had been watching her during a long silence, which he broke by abruptly exclaiming—

‘Florence, you are eating your heart out about something! What is it?’

She looked up, but made no answer, and he went on—‘Is it that you feel aggrieved at Grainger's making court to Miss Vernon?’

‘Why do you ask?’ she said, turning sharply upon him.

‘Because people say that you do; because I cannot think of any other thing to account for the change in your manner; and because if that is the reason of the change you are very foolish: you have no right to feel so. You have no right to to feel so, you know, on your own showing—

‘I know what I know,’ she broke in impatiently, her cheeks flushing and eyes flashing as she spoke. ‘It isn’t at Grainger’s making court to Miss Vernon that I’m aggrieved; any feeling I have on that point is pity for her.’

‘What *is* wrong with you, then, Flo?’ he said soothingly. ‘You know you have not been yourself of late.’

‘And I fear I never will be myself again, Dick!’ she said, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing with a vio-

lence that all but choked her utterance. 'Never, Dick!' she went on, speaking brokenly between her sobs. 'I'm tonguetied; but you will know all soon. But don't speak to me about it again, Dick: it tortures me. And now, please, leave me to myself a little while.'

'Whatever it is, Flo,' he said earnestly, 'always remember that you may depend upon me;' and then seeing that it would be better so, he obeyed her wish to be left alone.

As Mr Grainger continued his visits to the Vernons with unabated frequency, it was concluded that they were not, at any rate, opposed by Blanche; but whether she was anything more than passive in the matter could not be gathered.

The Parson had broken the bad news to her gently, and she had borne the blow bravely. After the first shock she made no moan to others, but her pale, smileless face and listless, self-absorbed air gave

sufficient proof that she suffered. When she was so far recovered that she could reason with herself concerning her loss, one of the first thoughts that came into her mind was that Grainger would again come seeking her as his wife, and a fear that if he did, she would no longer have the strength of mind to effectually resist his importunities, struck chill to her heart. When he renewed his visits to the house she divined full well what they portended, as did also her mother, who once more—though in a more gentle key—took up her song of praise of Grainger as a match. Grainger himself behaved with great tact. He sent presents of fruits, and flowers, and books, and in other ways tried to show his sympathy; but he always acted with delicacy, and made a point of involving the mother in the matter. He did all that a friend might do, and nothing that—as done—need in itself have implied more than simple friendship. While her

grief was yet in its first greenness he made no allusion to his own hopes, indeed, gave no intimation that he had hopes, but all this Blanche's instinct told her was strengthening him, weakening her, against the time should come when he would speak of them—and two months after the receipt of the intelligence of Harding's death the time did come.

On calling one evening he found Blanche alone, and looking so extremely languid, that on seeing her he involuntarily exclaimed,

‘Are you ill, Miss Vernon?’

‘No,’ she answered, forcing a faint smile; ‘at least, if I said I was, I couldn’t give my illness a name, and yet my friends all tell me I look ill, and I feel as weak and weary as though I were.’

‘You require change.’

He spoke with a slight emphasis, which she however failed to notice, for it was evident that she spoke without the slight-

est feeling of interest as she answered,
'Do you think so?'

'I do, indeed,' he replied; 'I believe it would do you good, and, curiously enough, I had the subject in my mind when I came in. I am after a large contract from France, and Barber was going to Paris about it; but it struck me as I came along just now that your brother might go, and take you with him. The actual business wouldn't take many hours, and then he could attend to you for as much longer as you cared to stay; or, if you would rather go on to Italy, there are some little affairs of mine there that Sidney could go and look up. There—there—'

He wanted to say something to the effect that there need not be any hesitation on the score of expense, but being unable at the moment to hit upon any form of words that was at once sufficiently meaning and roundabout, he broke down.

She understood his hesitation, and looking into his face with a sweet smile on her own, said, 'I do not feel equal to the fatigue of travelling, Mr Grainger, but I know what you mean,—you are very good to me.'

Her kindness of tone and look seemed to fire him.

'I would be good to you if you would let me, if you would give me the right to be,' he exclaimed in a low, passionate tone. 'I know how selfish I am to speak of myself now; but my feelings are too much for me. You know what those feelings are—that I love you, and cannot be happy without you. Will you make me happy? will you be my wife?'

'It would not be right, Mr Grainger,' she was beginning in a low troubled tone, when he impetuously overbore her:

'I know what you would say,' he exclaimed, 'and it is my misfortune, not your fault, that it is so. I speak, remem-

bering everything. I ask for scarcely more than the friendship you have already given me. I know that the best of your love lies buried in the sea, and I do not expect what you have not to give. Still you could make me happy, and I would do all that man could to make you so, and I ask you once more, will you be my wife ?'

Her face was averted, but she knew by the sound of his voice that he was impassionately earnest. She felt that if she refused him—in the conciliatory, kindly way in which alone she felt capable of uttering a refusal—he would not take her answer as final. The mere thought of a recurrence of such scenes as this, and of her mother's preaching down her heart, now seemed terrible to her. More than this, though her grief for her lost lover had been deep and heartfelt, she had not raved or made any romantic vows of eternal fidelity to his memory.

She knew that many a girl who had lost a first love by death had afterwards married; and sometimes when she had been thinking over things her mother had said, she had admitted to herself the possibility that she might marry some day—and supposing she should marry, had not Grainger a preferential claim to her hand now that Lionel has gone? But though she tried to reason in his favour, her heart did not prompt a 'Yes.' She was at a loss how to answer, and reading her indecision in her distressed looks, he pressed his cause.

'Don't misunderstand me,' he went on. 'I don't ask you to be my wife now; but will you promise me that you will, say, in a year? Say you will relieve me from this doubt.'

He paused, but still she made no answer, and he resumed—'If you will, you need not fear that you will in the

interval be persecuted by any boyish love-making. I will be much the same as I am now, only quietly happy. Will you not promise me that ?'


Again there was a pause ; and watching her with eager anxiety, he could see that she was torn by conflicting feeling. To him the minute that this silence lasted seemed interminable, and he spoke again, asking, 'Have you no answer for me?'

For one moment more she again remained silent, and then raising her head and showing a face on which there was now a look of resolve, she answered in a firm distinct voice, 'Yes, that much I promise. If a year hence you still wish it, I will be your wife.'

He uttered a few fervent words of thanks, and then seeing that she desired to be alone, left her.

Having spoken the word that bound her, Blanche tried to look only on the

brighter side of the situation, but the vague feeling of antipathy to Grainger would assert itself, and bring with it a depressing sense of evil to come. One night in particular, about a week after she had given her promise, this vague prophetic fear fell so strongly upon her as she sat pondering alone, that at last it grew to sheer despair; and flinging herself on her bed, she prayed that she might be with her dead Lionel ere her year of grace was out. Presently, however, when this violence of feeling had worn itself out, there came thoughts which, though even more vague than her dread of evil, had a consoling effect. Her mind, too, turned upon the chapter of accidents. 'Many things,' she said to herself, 'might happen within a year, and perhaps something would happen to save her from the necessity of fulfilling her promise.' She hoped so, but hoped it in all innocence. She would have shuddered at the idea of



entertaining such a hope could she have known of a 'something' that was at that very moment being devised—a something that, though arranged without any reference to her, was of a nature to relieve her from any fear of having to marry Grainger.

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